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Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Regents' Revisited

I was recently sent a copy of a New York State Regents' exam, and I was glad to see that Regents' are alive and well, though somewhat diminished from when I took the exams in the 1940s.

The Regents' embody an old—and sound—idea: that students should be expected to master a certain body of knowledge and that they should be tested on it to show their mastery. In the case of the Regents' exams, the standards for what students should know are set by the state of New York. But you can find tests embodying a similar principle in industrialized countries with successful education systems—France, Germany, Japan.

Regents' exams pay an old-fashioned homage to the value of solid, straightforward information.

The Regents' exam I looked at—one in U.S. history and government—asked students to answer questions that ranged from the beginning of the United States to the day before yesterday. It was a three-hour exam that consisted of 47 multiple-choice and 3 essay questions, with the multiple-choice counting 55 percent and the essays 45 percent, and it required students to show some basic knowledge about important events and trends in our history and how our government works. For example,

6. Which action is the best example of checks and balances?
   1. President Ronald Reagan ordering a military attack on Libya
   2. the Supreme Court ruling that President Richard Nixon must surrender the Watergate tapes
   3. the 26th amendment giving 18-year-old citizens the right to vote
   4. the House of Representatives voting to censure one of its members

Other multiple-choice questions asked students to make active use of what they knew by interpreting the significance of a cartoon, a group of headlines, a couple of pie charts or a graph.

The essay questions called for brief, straightforward discussions of important subjects:

II, 1. The Constitutional Convention of 1787 used compromise to address conflicts over major issues facing the new nation. Some of these issues [were:] representation, states' rights, slavery, tariffs, civil liberties, taxation. Choose *three* of the issues listed and for *each* one chosen: Describe a conflict that arose over the issue at the Constitutional Convention. Explain how that issue was resolved through the use of compromise.

Now, neither of these questions requires a subtle or profound knowledge of U.S. history or government. Like the other questions on the exam, they call for the basic knowledge that all citizens need. Could top high school graduates—which is what the kids who take the Regents' are—achieve at a higher level? Certainly. All we have to do is look at the school-leaving exams that comparable students in other industrialized countries take—tests like the German *Abitur* and the French *baccalauréat*. However, these are high-stakes exams. German and French students need to pass them in order to get into university. If New York colleges and universities required a high level of preparation as evidenced by passing tough Regents' exams—and they once did—then New York students, too, would perform at higher levels.

But as they stand, the Regents' exams offer a useful perspective on some of the current controversies about standards in education—for example, the battle over outcomes-based education (OBE). The big problem with OBE is not that it bases education on outcomes. After all, the New York State Regents' exams are based on "outcomes"—on how well kids have mastered and can use a basic body of knowledge about our history and government. The problem is that the outcomes adopted by some of the states are so vague. Compare the "outcome" illustrated by the Regents' questions on the Constitution or the separation of powers with the corresponding Pennsylvania citizenship outcome:

3. All students describe the development and operations of economic, political, legal and governmental systems in the United States, assess their own relationships to those systems and compare them to those in other nations.

This standard offers no guidance as to what students should know. It is so broad and open-ended that kids meeting it could know everything there is to know about U.S. history and government—or next to nothing.

The standards embodied in the Regents' exams also provide a useful perspective on current struggles to establish the national standards called for by the Goals 2000 legislation. Standards do not have to be overstuffed, like the world history standards that were recently released. And they do not have to be controversial. The New York State Regents' exams pay an old-fashioned homage to the value of solid, straightforward information, and they should be revisited by everyone who is thinking about how to devise standards for what our students should know and be able to do.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1994 by Albert Shanker.

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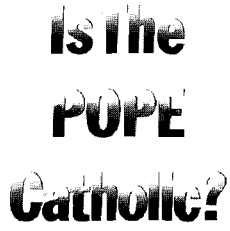

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CORRESPONDENCE

Meeting Mr. Wright

To the editors:

I have had doubts about evolutionary psychology ever since I took an undergraduate course in it. The subject was fascinating, but I just couldn't be convinced that a man who has sex with a prostitute seeks "the illusion of reproduction" when 99 percent of men would be aghast to learn that a prostitute had their child. I am equally amused by Robert Wright's argument ("Feminists, Meet Mr. Darwin," November 28) that while it is genetically costly for a woman to squander her sexual resources on a man who has bad genes or is a poor provider, "the worst likely outcome [of unwanted sex] for the man (in genetic terms) is that pregnancy would not ensue." Never mind that in real-life terms, the worst likely outcome is that pregnancy *would* ensue. And how to explain most men's revulsion at the idea of coerced sex with a man? To paraphrase Wright, wasting fifteen minutes on non-reproductive sex is hardly a major Darwinian disaster.

Without disputing that much human behavior has *some* biological basis, we can't overlook that the human animal has been looking to separate sex from procreation since the dawn of history. Many polls find that men are more supportive of legalized abortion than women, a peculiarity some attribute to men's greater desire for sex without consequences—a desire that can hardly be explained by reproductive strategy.

CATHY YOUNG
Middletown, New Jersey

To the editors:

Robert Wright's spelunking of the deeps of psycho-Darwinism for the edification of science-challenged feminists (and journalists) was overdue. That today's high-powered women tend to choose even higher-powered men (e.g., Jane Fonda and Ted Turner) shows that these distant daughters of cavewomen still know which side their mastodon is buttered on.

But female sexual reluctance may have an additional explanation. Until well into the nineteenth century, not only was gestation and childbearing a huge biological investment for women, it often was a lethal endeavor. Surely women since paleolithic times must have had trepidations about an activity that could lead to an early death. The advent of reliable contraception and modern obstetrics changed all that. Modern capitalism has made it possible for women to provide for themselves outside of marriage. All these innovations came from patriarchal Testiculo-Americans, who often had wives and daughters to support.

WARREN WETMORE
Hazel Crest, Illinois

To the editors:

I disagree with Robert Wright's Darwinian explanation for the differences between male and female sexual behavior. A look around will dispel the theory that men engage in more guilt-free promiscuity, perhaps for evolutionary reasons, and women less, because of our limited reproductive capabilities. In fact, there is one virtuous, highly selective woman for every "naturally oppressive, possessive, flesh-obsessed pig" available. Rarely does any man, no matter how morally corrupt, monetarily deprived or just plain ugly, go wanting for a suitable mate to pass on his genes to the next generation. It seems that we women aren't selective at all in our choice of mates—and men better hope that we never are. I suspect that we will continue to breed more of the same.

SHANNON E. OLIVER
Riverside, California

To the editors:

I am not enough of a geneticist to know whether Wright's theory has scientific merit, but I do know that the treatment accorded this article is different from that given to the article by Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein regarding race and I.Q. Perhaps your largely male editorial staff managed to miss the similarity in the analyses. Each essentially argues that certain human behavior is determined by our genes. What surprises me is that your magazine experienced a revolt over Murray's article, yet, apparently, did not hear even an editorial staff whimper with regard to Wright's stimulating article.

CHARLES RAPPOLD
Plainfield, New Jersey

Papal bull

To the editors:

Andrew Sullivan's semi-annual wrangle with the Vatican on the theology of homosexuality ("Alone Again, Naturally," November 21) has passed from inadvertent comedy to plain pathos. The vast majority of Catholics routinely ignore papal bull, so why can't Sullivan? The answer is that Sullivan actually takes Catholicism seriously. Yikes. If he can write five-page essays on the shortcomings of natural law, imagine what he thinks of bread and butter Catholic theology: talking snakes, the walking dead, blood sacrifice, symbolic cannibalism, sperm transmission of soul-stain and all the rest?

Sullivan's sanitized account of recent Church teachings on the gay question isn't funny in the least. It's disturbing that he does not focus on John Paul II's hoary defense of gay-bashing violence and his call to arms for active discrimination and exclusion of homosexuals from full participation in community life. As recent as this spring the pope was hectoring the European Parliament for extending full civil rights to homosexuals.

PETER CATALANO
Boston, Massachusetts

Mistaken identity

To the editors:

Leon Wieseltier is on target with his contention that the notion of identity has virtually replaced any concept of morality or value in our society ("Against Identity," November 28). I would, at the same time, take issue with where he seems to find the root of our modern-day obsession with identity, namely, in the writings of Erik Erikson. Unless I am reading him incorrectly, Erikson makes a strong effort to connect the finding and development of a full identity, in human beings, with the commitments one makes in adult life to people, causes, beliefs and values. One cannot understand what identity is about, for Erikson, apart from the courage to make commitments.

Wieseltier is not altogether innocent of what he is attacking, however. Not until the end of the article do we get to the heart of the matter: "Selflessness does not mean that you do not know yourself. It means that you have been drawn out of yourself." With that concluding statement, Erikson would thoroughly agree.

REV. DANIEL R. HEISCHMAN
Washington, D.C.

Fermented

To the editors:

Every con man knows that at the heart of every workable scam lies a desire on the part of the victim to believe something that is not true. Michael Kinsley, not being a con man, thus misses the bigger reason why most Americans believe Clinton raised their taxes ("Money Talks," November 28): they want to believe Clinton raised their taxes and grew the size of government. Among some segments, the desire to believe is particularly ripe, leading to particularly fermented beliefs, e.g., Bill Clinton at the center of a massive Vince Foster murder conspiracy. But a large part of the mainstream also wants to believe. People want to believe that they are victims of another constituency; that the government is raising their taxes

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to benefit someone else; that the government is dominated by special interests that are not their interests. Contrary to the budget figures, the government is believed to be in the hands of the poor, the immigrants, the "criminal coddlers," the counterculture. This is a convenient belief. At a time when the government can no longer spend what it has been spending, when middle-class entitlements must be reduced, when the majority of people must make some sacrifice, the belief that the government belongs to someone else lets us off the hook. This excuse obviates responsibility.

Kinsley attributes far too much influence to well-paid opinion makers. *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, after all, has promoted all sorts of other stories and "facts" that hardly receive wide currency. We are a nation in denial, denying that we are, in fact, the "special interests" ourselves. Apparently the largest group of people now demanding to be treated as victims is the middle class.

JIM BESSEN
Wallingford, Pennsylvania

Bang and blame

To the editors:

Mickey Kaus opens his November 28 TRB, "Blame George," with refreshing irony about Washington's blame game. Then he succumbs to that same reflex with his own hatchet job on George Stephanopoulos.

Stephanopoulos's sins, according to Kaus, include not adequately sucking up to the press. To restrict the press's access inside the White House was a mistake. But if reporters' stinging coverage of this administration derives from feeling slighted, that indicts a sulking, self-absorbed media. Also, says Kaus, Stephanopoulos is "an '80s liberal." At 33, what other kind of liberal could he possibly be?

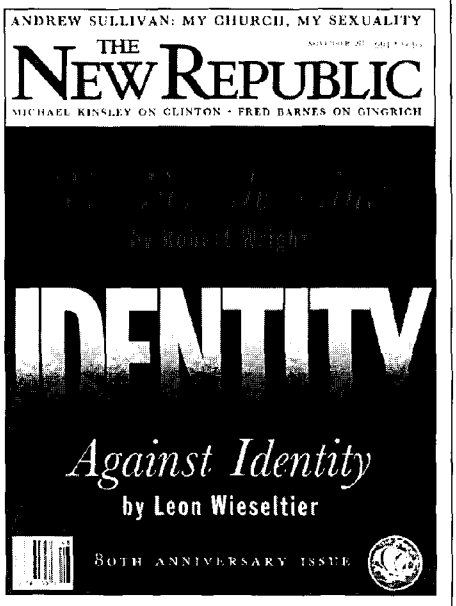
In Kaus's world, no one is allowed to emerge unscathed, whether the criticism is deserved or not. Now it's time to go after the guy who's been getting good press. It must be his fault. It can't be that he's doing a good job.

BARTHOLOMEW ACOCELLA
Washington, D.C.

Citizen arrest

To the editors:

We welcome Jeff Rosen's endorsement of our 1985 book, *Citizenship Without Consent* ("Citizens," Washington Diarist, November 21), but wish to clarify one important point. We do argue that automatic birthright citizenship is not constitutionally required. Yet we address the question of what policy Congress should adopt with a more nuanced, ambivalent approach than Rosen could convey in his brief piece. We saw force in arguments for retaining birthright citizenship for those children who will live their lives here. We wrote that "Congress must carefully weigh the moral claims of other groups, assessing the likely effects on illegal immigration of eliminating their present guarantee of citizenship, and considering how such a change should relate to the more comprehensive, systematic measures for reducing illegal immigration that we and others have proposed, including employer sanctions, enhanced border enforcement and enlarged legal admissions quotas. Then, and only then, can Congress responsibly resolve the birthright citizenship question." Since we wrote this, the government has done



those three things.

We raised the birthright question in 1985 in part because we feared that legitimate concerns about illegal migration would encourage racist and nativist attacks on even legal immigrants. Some aspects of the current anti-immigrant mood confirm those fears. But we also believe that states such as California should not have to bear disproportionate burdens of national immigration policies. We still urge the federal government to take greater responsibility for principled, fully funded and effective policies, and that these policies be as generous as possible.

PETER SCHUCK
ROGERS SMITH
New York, New York

No name

To the editors:

In the abundance of letters in the November 28 Correspondence section responding to the previously published *Bell Curve* article, one letter stood out because of its anonymity, unless the writer is really named Name Withheld, Harvard University. Mr. or Ms. Withheld applauded TNR's publishing the article, and had some kind words for its authors. The real significance of that letter is that the writer who teaches at that bastion of learning and research, Harvard, fears that if his or her name is revealed, the slings and arrows of outrageous retribution will be unloaded upon the transgressor who dared cross that bastion of learning.

DONALD DAVITT
Prescott, Arizona

To the editors:

I'm not sure which is more disturbing, a Harvard University Department of Psychology member's apparently asking his or her name to be withheld from a letter or THE NEW REPUBLIC's publishing it at all—let alone permitting its institutional origin to show.

Seeing "Name Withheld" in place of the signature of (presumably) a faculty member makes me wonder whether social meaning has been totally drained from what I have always taken as a satisfyingly descriptive title—"Professor." Any of us in the academy who feels the need to hide under the cloak of anonymity reveals a failure to understand that without "publishing," wherein one's peers can examine one's work, the academy itself also perishes.

Why did the editors agree to publish it? To print an anonymous piece in a journal of opinion is strange business. For opinion to be attended to, it is crucial to know the source. But then to withhold the name and show the institutional origin runs the risk of, on the one hand, implying authority for the positions expressed, or, on the other, suggesting an institutional climate of fear and intimidation that negatively reflects on the author's colleagues. Neither outcome seems warranted, especially given such a relatively innocuous letter.

HENDRIK D. GIDEONSE
Cincinnati, Ohio

Silver Lining No. 5

To the editors:

Your "Silver Lining" note on post-election results missed an obvious bit of joy for the disenchanted: ever since the resignation of Nixon, we have been looking for a mean-spirited Republican conservative to kick around. In Newt Gingrich we have finally found our man.

BURLING LOWREY
Washington, D.C.

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Even though it had been only minutes since their last lovemaking, [he] was as ever overwhelmed by the sight of her, the shameless pleasure she took in her own body and its effect on him. Still, he mustn't let her see just how much she moved him.... He stretched in turn, reached over for his cigarettes and gold-plated Ronson on the Art Deco nightstand with its Tiffany lamp. Since he wasn't sure what to say, he made a production out of lighting up and enjoying that first, luxurious after-bout inhalation.

His continued silence earned him a small punishment.

"Darling ... isn't it time for you to leave?"...

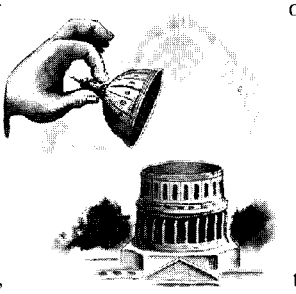
"Aw, hell, I don't want to.... I wish I could just divorce Mrs. Little Goodie Two-Shoes!"

"*I* like this arrangement," she laughed softly. "Mistress to the chief of staff of the president of the United States."...

Suddenly the pouting sex kitten gave way to Diana the Huntress. She rolled onto him and somehow was sitting athwart his chest, her knees pinning his shoulders....

"I will make you do terrible things," she hissed.

—excerpt from draft novel *(1945)* co-authored by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, as reported in *The New York Times*



He had planned years for this night, but he tried not to let his excitement show. You had to be rational about these things. So many relationships were sloppy, unplanned. The result was wasteful breakups. He was determined to avoid those mistakes. So far, the project had gone smoothly. First, the 1,000-page history of sex. What were its purposes? Spiritual? Procreative? What was the medieval view? The six months he'd spent in the library exploring these questions had only heightened his ardor. Then came the working groups, compiling for him the names and occupations of every unmarried woman in Washington. All of the information was contained in a series of black looseleaf binders, arrayed on his wall, in alphabetical order, just above the Art Deco nightstand. And only he had the phone numbers! Finally, the "tollgate" sessions. Anything that might go wrong had been anticipated, with fallback solutions listed in a series of detailed flowcharts. But this was no time for looking back. The doorbell was ringing.

"Hi." She was everything he had predicted, especially her large public sector.

"Come in," he said, moving through his mental checklist.

"May I sit down?"

"Uh,... of course." A disturbing element of randomness was creeping into the encounter. "Don't you want to go out and see a movie?" he asked, tensing up.

"Sure. What do you want to see?"

"I thought maybe *Quiz Show*." It was top-rated.

"You idiot. *Quiz Show* left town weeks ago."

"Oh."

He told himself not to panic. There was a process for this. Calmly, deliberately, he crossed the room and pulled down a red binder marked "Love 2000." His fingers slid instinctively over the dividers, gently exploring. Then he raised his eyes and smiled.

"We'll rent a video then."

"So it's true," she said coolly, unbelting her dress and stepping into his arms. "You've thought of *everything*."

—*excerpt from draft novel* (Innocent Alliances) *by senior presidential adviser Ira Magaziner*

It had been months since their last lovemaking. She had heard he was in a cynical, angry mood, but she hadn't known how angry.

"Goddammit, you aren't what you seemed to be at all," he screamed, slamming down his gold-plated Ronson. "I *hate* you. Mrs. Little Goodie Two-Shoes! And it will take two years to get a divorce. I'm stuck with you until 1996!" The Tiffany lamp flew across the room and exploded at her feet....

In the days that followed, she retreated, confused. At first, she said she didn't want to talk about it. Then she said, "I don't know what this means." Then one afternoon, suddenly, she understood.

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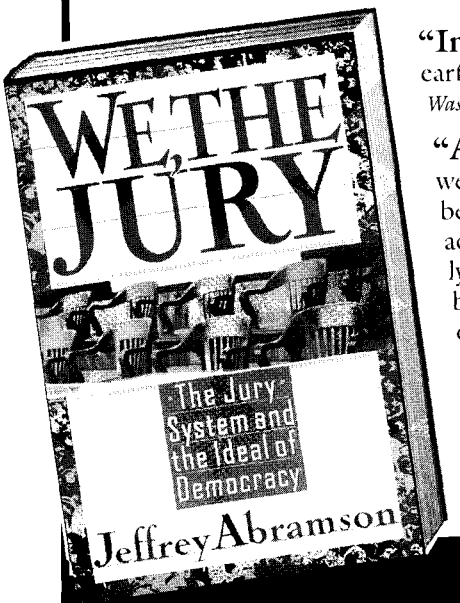

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

DECEMBER 26, 1994

CLINTON AND AIDS

In Washington, World AIDS Day, December 1, came and went quietly. The president met in private with a group of HIV-positive youngsters, who later held a press conference at the National Office of AIDS Policy. It included a 15-year-old hemophiliac, a 13-year-old infected during open-heart surgery, two white gay men and a white HIV-positive mother whose baby had escaped infection. Most of the attention focused on the gurgling, HIV-negative baby. The moral of the meeting was that AIDS is not just a minority problem, but a "human" disease. The stories were moving, but wildly unrepresentative of the truth about AIDS.

Here's the truth. One-quarter of a million people, mainly young, have now died in America from an avoidable viral infection—five times the number who died in Vietnam. A million more are infected. Around half of the gay men in metropolitan areas are thought to be HIV-positive. The total figure of a million infected has held steady for the past few years because new infections are easily making up for deaths. Soon, they could actually begin to outnumber them.

Hysterical? Not exactly. Infection rates have fallen (but by no means ended) among those bombarded with safer sex messages—gay white men over 25. But infection rates are spiraling elsewhere. Half of all new infections are in people under 25, one-quarter in those under 20. The greatest increases are among blacks, who now make up one-third of all reported AIDS cases, Latinos, who make up 18 percent, and women, who account for 12 percent. The rates in these groups are increasing fast. In 1986 blacks made up 20 percent of new AIDS cases; now, they're 40 percent. Since 1988 the number of new AIDS cases among I.V. drug users has increased fourfold. And even these are likely low estimates. Forty percent of AIDS cases among blacks are reported after death, and 80 percent of Latinos are diagnosed at the very end of their illness. And these figures, remember, are about full-blown AIDS. How much more worrying is the HIV-infection trend? We just don't know.

From the start of this epidemic, politics have impeded sane public health. The right's discomfort with sex halted a response; the left's over-sensitivity to minorities and civil liberties stalled some measures. The Clintonites, alas, have only partly broken the pattern. To be fair, the president has won some important battles. In both budgets, Clinton marked AIDS spending in all three categories—research, treatment and prevention—as a priority. Funding for research at the National Institutes of Health went up by 25 percent last year (compared to 7 percent elsewhere), and was brought under a new AIDS strategic plan. Funding for the Ryan White CARE Act, which gives grants to AIDS treatment clinics, increased by 85 percent. And prevention funds went up by one-fifth, after remaining flat for three years. The president created a Drug Development Task Force to speed research on new drugs. It's hard to imagine George Bush doing any of this.

But it still doesn't match the plague's advance. Clinton hasn't highlighted the black and Latino crisis, or the uptake in young gay infections, for fear of political incorrectness; for similar reasons, he hasn't trumpeted the good news about research that would bolster support for more funding; and his first AIDS czar was a second-rate hack in a second-rate office. Only the Centers for Disease Control has taken some steps: last year, the agency put out a series of condom ads and gave control of prevention funds to local councils, who have a better sense of what works on the streets. But these efforts are still not enough to reach the minority youngsters and drug users most at risk. To do that, the administration has to promote more explicit education on sexually transmitted diseases that make HIV transmission easier and on the dangers of drug use, and—yes—push for more effective clean needle distribution. A recent study on such needle programs in New York City, where around half of all I.V. drug users have HIV, found the programs cut infection rates by 50 percent to 75 percent. As government programs go, that's a triumph.

Of course, there's the small problem of the Republicans. As a concession to the right, there's no reason newly focused education programs shouldn't also include strong messages in favor of abstinence: no sex is, after all, the only safe sex there really is. But the GOP needs to understand that we need more than that. Public health protection is not primarily an instrument for moral engineering; it's one of the first duties of government, period. The increasing numbers of people getting infected with HIV and dying of AIDS are Americans, too. It will be one of the first tests of the decency of the new Congress whether it understands that. •

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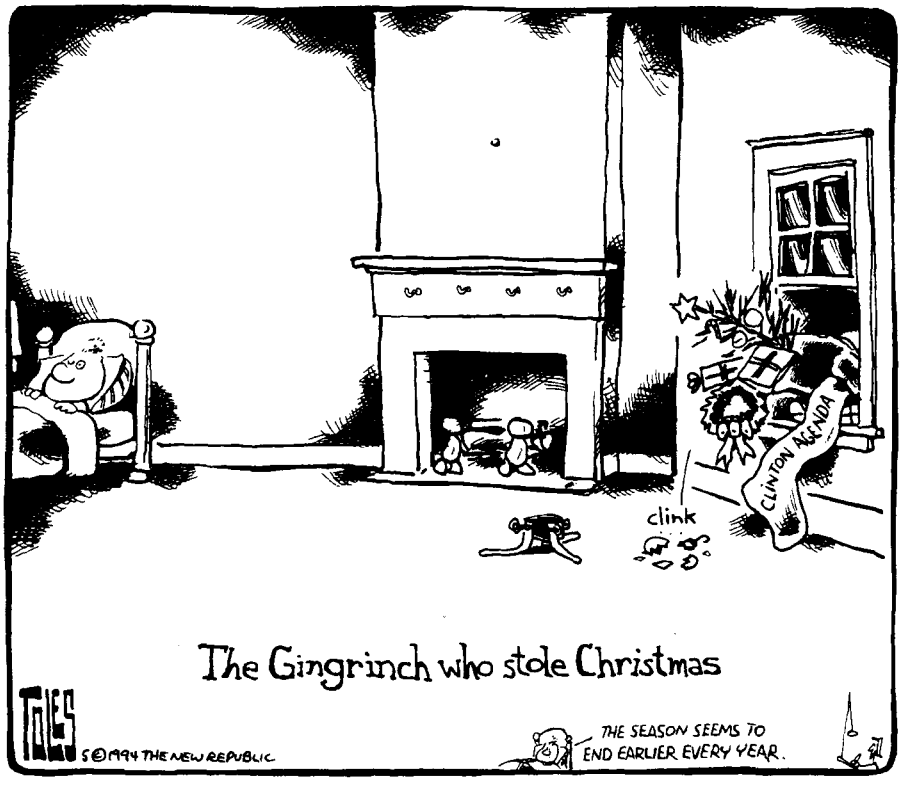
NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: Newt Gingrich said Hillary Clinton should "go to Blockbuster and rent the Mickey Rooney movie *Boys Town*" before criticizing his plan to end welfare for out-of-wedlock children and fund orphanages instead. The Child Welfare League of America estimated welfare costs for a child living with a mother to be $2,644 per year; in orphanages, $36,500. The Congressional Budget Office said the Clinton administration's welfare reform proposal underestimates its cost by $2.5 billion, and overestimates the number of people who will be taken off welfare by 176 percent. The FBI reported that the juvenile homicide rate has quadrupled since 1984. Tennessee Humanities Teacher of the Year Peggy Fragopoulous was suspended for taking off her slip during a game of spin the bottle at a school dance. Germany's state archaeologist said a recently discovered bunker used by Adolf Hitler's bodyguards, and containing heroic murals of s.s. soldiers, should be preserved, "to give future generations the chance for an on-site consideration of history." Bulgarian artist Christo announced plans to cover the seat of the German government with a 90,000-square-yard blanket. The General Accounting Office reported that the federal government will owe California at least $1.4 billion next year, to offset the cost of illegal immigration. Before being sentenced to life in prison for causing a 14,000-acre flood, James Scott told a Missouri court he removed "a few sandbags" from a Mississippi River levee to indicate a possible leak. In Arkansas' Whitewater investigation, former Associate Attorney General Webster Hubbell pleaded guilty to billing clients $390,000 in inflated fees and expenses. Bill Clinton's horoscope said, "Those who thought you were out of it will be amazed, embarrassed."



DATE-WATCHERS: Eight men recently filed claims against Jenny Craig Inc., a Massachusetts diet company, claiming that female co-workers sexually harassed them. One former employee, Joseph Egan, told *The Wall Street Journal* that his female coworkers commented on his impressive biceps, nice eyes and "tight buns," and one female supervisor told him she had dreamed about seeing him naked. Even more humiliating, as the A.P. story reports, male employees were made to wear the same uniforms as female employees: white coats and pale blue scarves. Another male employee, Tracy Tinkham, was told that the only way he could get promoted was to have a sex-change operation or to wear a push-up bra. "If I was having a bad day, it was not uncommon for one of the women to say, 'You must be having your period,'" Tinkham said. A former supervisor, Donna Curio, said the female-dominated company "did not want to hire men because men wanted management, men wanted more money, they wanted it faster, because they had families." Poor baby. According to the sex-blind vision of gender discrimination, this is a textbook violation of Title VII. Which says more about Title VII than it does about Jenny Craig.

ORANGE AID: When American big cities ran into fiscal crises, beset by debt, high taxes and underfunded schools, not a few conservatives blithely threw up their hands in indifference. Oops. Now the capital of the anti-government right, Orange County, California, has found itself filing for bankruptcy, a victim of reckless borrowing and poor financial management. This poses a painful quandary for the federal government-bashers. Will they let their mecca end up like Bridgeport, Connecticut? Or can we safely redefine a liberal as a conservative who's gone bankrupt?

POLITICALLY CORRECT CONSERVATIVES: The politics of identity is not, it turns out, restricted to the left. In a recent rant in *The New York Post*, Hilton Kramer

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directs his ire against *New York Times* editorial writer Brent Staples. Staples's crime was writing a *Times* column blaming the Democrats' election defeat and reigning conservatism on the nefarious influence of the late Leo Strauss, a conservative political philosopher at the University of Chicago. Much of Staples's column was indeed ludicrous: a mixture of crude generalizations about Strauss and silly hysterics about the fate of America. But it was not completely nutty. Staples accused Strauss of anti-democratic sympathies and of severe doubts about the Enlightenment project. Any serious reader of Strauss knows these charges are not far off the mark, although Strauss was also a fan of constitutional government, modeled on Aristotelian lines. But Kramer's attack on Staples missed these nuances. The sub-head on his piece was: "RESIDENT BLACK MILITANT BRENT STAPLES UNLEASHES A TIRADE THAT SINGLES OUT JEWISH THINKERS." In the article, Kramer said that "Staples has made a specialty of maligning intellectuals—particularly, it must be said, Jewish intellectuals." Later, just in case you missed the point, Kramer describes Strauss as "an obscure Jewish philosopher." Nowhere in Staples's piece is there any reference to Strauss's Jewishness; and Staples also attacks Thomas Sowell (black) and William A. Henry (white) in the same piece as acolytes of Straussian elitism. In the context of the argument, Strauss's ethnicity is completely irrelevant. Unless, of course, you prefer to reduce any intellectual disagreement to the more emotionally satisfying arena of racial warfare. Which is where Hilton Kramer, among many others on the P.C. right, feels most at home.

MARKET FLUCTUATIONS:

Orders for Machine Tools
Increased 45.5% in October

—*The New York Times*, November 28

Machine-Tool
Orders Dropped
29% in October

—*The Wall Street Journal*, same day
(Thanks to Greg Dow, New York, New York.)

Selloff Fails to Shake
Stock Fund Investors

—*The New York Times*, November 30

Investor Withdrawals
Jolt Many Stock Funds

—*The Wall Street Journal*, same day
(Thanks to many readers.)

PORK WATCH: Republicans are pouring into Washington bent on streamlining government spending. Too bad no one told Republican Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon. Last September, he channeled a $1.15 million increase in construction funds to the Columbia River Gorge Discovery Center in a federally designated national scenic area. The National Forest Service, which oversees the area, didn't request the money, but Hatfield's press secretary describes that as a bureaucratic wink and nudge: the Forest Service, trying not to exceed its budget cap, made a smaller request and counted on friendly senators like Hatfield to kick in the extra funds. His spokeswoman also points out that the project arose from a bipartisan act passed in 1986—this is just the latest installment of federal funds. But surely Republicans would agree that budget caps exist for a reason. Or are they important only when they don't conflict with re-election?

AAAGH: "The last sentence of Mike Royko's column was omitted in some editions of Thursday's *Tribune*. The last line should have said: 'Eeeeyaaach.' The *Tribune* regrets the error."—*The Chicago Tribune*, November 25 •

CONSUMED

POP ROCKS

By Bill Gifford

A couple is silhouetted against a rustic beach shack—on Catalina Island, at dawn. He's giving her a great big diamond, and she's saying "Yes."

You know what the ad is saying: just try popping the question without a rock. "An exceptional diamond of two carats, or more, is so rare," claims the fine print in that ubiquitous DeBeers ad, "that fewer than 1 percent of women will ever own one."

Not any more, as Inspector Clouseau used to say. That "exceptional" two-carat diamond—girl's best friend, guy's worst nightmare—may soon be available in a Wal-Mart near you. Though synthetic and made in Russia, it will be close enough to the real thing to loosen the grip that DeBeers, the giant South African diamond-mining cartel, has on the single man's wallet.

"Seven thousand dollars is an awful lot to spend on a symbol," says Thomas Chatham, the man who hopes to bring about the budget engagement ring. Chatham fairly glistens with the fruits of his family business: synthetic gemstones. Sapphire cufflinks fasten his shirtsleeves; a large emerald ring burdens his left hand, balanced by a Liberace-caliber ruby on his right. When I

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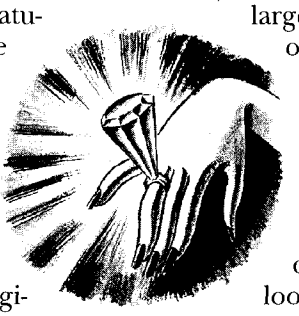
refer to his gems as "fake," he gently corrects me. "We prefer the term 'created.' "

Despite having just returned from Siberia, the 48-year-old Chatham looks relaxed and tanned as he extracts his new product line from a plastic case: synthetic yellow diamonds from Russia. Like natural diamonds, these are crystals of pure carbon, glinting with light, not that cubic zirconia junk sold on QVC. They equal natural diamonds in hardness and refractivity, the two qualities that mark the stone; you need a laboratory to tell the difference. They're just a few thousand years younger and about one-tenth as expensive as mined diamonds.



Synthetic diamonds have actually been around since the 1950s, when General Electric first grew carbon crystals. By 1955 G.E. engineers even made diamonds from peanut butter, according to Robert Hazen, a scientist at the Carnegie Institution's Washington Geophysical Laboratory. DeBeers itself now grows synthetic diamonds for industrial uses. The undisputed leader in crystal-growing was always the former Soviet Union, where gem-grade synthetic diamonds were grown for use in military equipment and electronics. The G.E. engineers grew some big blue diamonds for their wives to wear, but nobody ever marketed synthetics as gems until Chatham announced his intention to do so, at a trade show in July 1993.

How come? Chatham says it's because DeBeers has used strong-arm tactics to protect its market. "Every time somebody has popped up who could do this, DeBeers has stepped in and said, 'That's not such a good idea.' " Last year DeBeers summoned Chatham to a meeting in London, only to cancel at the last minute. Shortly thereafter, his plans began to unravel. The price of Russian synthetics, he found, mysteriously skyrocketed. His key Russian contacts, the directors of a military research institute at Novosibirsk, who were going to manufacture the diamonds, were suddenly fired. "Someone pulled the plug on them," Chatham says, "or on me."

DeBeers denies having anything to do with Chatham's troubles. But it does happen to be the largest buyer of Russia's natural diamonds. Gem-industry analyst Joel Arem says Chatham "was treading on some major toes."

A year later Chatham is trying to be more discreet. He says he is outfitting another Russian factory, the location of which he cares not to disclose. By 1995 he hopes to be churning out 1,000 carats a month—not much compared to the $11.5 billion U.S. diamond market, but still a lot of rings.

More troubling is the possibility that some of the Russian synthetics—which are essentially worthless—already may be leaking into the market. Officially, DeBeers and diamond retailers say they doubt this is occurring. The synthetics are too expensive to produce, they say, and too yellow in color. "We're not concerned at this point," says Michael Roman, chairman of Jewelers of America, a retailers' trade association.

Yet some evidence suggests otherwise. The trade magazine *Diamond International* has reported that illicit Siberian stones are sometimes polished and mixed into parcels of natural diamonds, then shipped to the West via Bangkok or Hong Kong. The fakes, typically tiny stones known as "white bears," sometimes run as large as three carats. The Gemological Institute of America has detected several synthetics in samples sent by retailers for routine certification.

While the majority of the synthetics are an unnatural yellow, due to impurities, pure white diamonds are just as easy to grow, says Hazen. Chatham showed me a one-carat white rough diamond, which looked like a chip of beach glass. That could spell trouble for DeBeers, whose marketing is predicated upon diamonds' rarity, their elemental origin in the heat and pressure deep within the Earth. At least one mass-market diamond importer is also stalking the Russian cut-rate diamond. "I'm going to sell it for $29.95," he vows. But will she still say "Yes"?

BILL GIFFORD is a staff writer at *Washington City Paper.*

THE MONEY CULTURE

RECESSION '95

By James J. Cramer

Most traders on Wall Street, myself included, share a Panglossian view of the United States business cycle known as the soft landing. In this view, a powerful and omniscient Federal Reserve sifts through mounds of data, senses the economy expanding a mite too rapidly and gently applies the brakes to keep the business cycle going at a subdued, non-inflationary pace. A few rate increases here, a couple of discount rate hikes there, and Captain Alan Greenspan carefully pilots us back to earth to fly again another day. Just recently, however, the Fed decided to crash-land the U.S. economy—and the result may be the recession of 1995.

On November 15, the Fed, frustrated by the remarkably strong data on job growth and commodity prices, decided to increase the federal funds rate—the rate for overnight bank borrowing that is the most sensitive indicator of the direction of interest rates. Since February the Fed had raised the rate five times. But none of these hikes was as big as the whopping three-quarters of a percentage point it went for this time. The politicians and

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economists have not yet awakened to what this means: we are now on a collision course with recession.

The Clinton administration, under Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, took an accommodating attitude toward the Fed's previous rate hikes, and it accorded this superhike the same treatment. Bentsen's imminent departure won't change that, either; incoming secretary Robert Rubin, now the White House economic policy coordinator, also gave his blessing to the Fed's move. You would think the politicians must believe the economy is indestructible—or at least not going to destruct until the winter of 1996. Of course, there's not much they can do about it anyway; once the Fed acts, any badmouthing by Treasury just provokes more selling by fearful bond traders, and therefore even higher interest rates, as Rubin knows from his days managing billions at Goldman, Sachs.

Come the fall of 1995, the economic wreckage, sadly, will be plain. Those of us who, on the news of the hike, immediately started selling Maytag, Bethlehem Steel, General Motors—and hundreds of other economically sensitive companies—understand that the Fed has now sided with the bondholders, who want their principal protected, and against the creators of jobs and corporate profits.

It's no coincidence that after the market's subsequent ninety-two-point, one-day plunge, it was mostly cyclical companies (the firms that make and bend steel, copper and aluminum, and that depend on sustained lower rates) dominating the list of stocks hitting their fifty-two-week lows. Worse, the Fed didn't signal—as it had with some of the rate boosts earlier this year—that this rate increase would do the trick for the time being. It left the door open for more hikes, ensuring that Greenspan & Co. won't relent until the economy has crashed and burned.

How can we be certain that the market is sending us the right signals? Despite some pundits' clichés about the stock market predicting many more recessions than have actually occurred, the declines in the big cyclical stocks have with consistent accuracy presaged every downturn or slowdown in the past twenty years. After the five other rate hikes of 1994, these same stocks had actually *rallied*, on the assumption that the Fed was still aiming for a soft landing. November's mini-crash in cyclicals told us that the Fed will succeed in getting its slowdown, and probably something far worse.

Why did the Fed switch from pinpoint to crash landing after five gentle rate shifts? For that answer we have got to go back to the fall of 1993. At that time, the fed funds rate had sat at an exceptionally low 3 percent for a full year. Consumers enjoyed the concomitant low short-term rates of adjustable rate mortgages, loans from auto companies and refinancings of existing mortgages—all of which were at the cheapest prices for money in years. These rock-bottom short rates triggered one of the greatest booms in the postwar period.

Despite plenty of data showing that the economy was gaining speed, the Fed chose to do nothing through all of 1993. Perhaps it was blinded by its own sleight of hand. By keeping short-term rates low, the Fed unwittingly encouraged banks, hedge funds and brokerage houses to borrow billions of short-term dollars to buy longer-term bonds so they could lock in a nifty gain (provided that the economy stayed in low gear). Financial institutions such as the now-infamous Orange County treasury took out loans at short rates, say for two years, to buy ten-year bonds that may have yielded twice as much. They pocketed the difference.

As long as rates stayed low, this magical "carry" yielded bountiful returns. But it also drove rates at the long end, particularly the thirty-year Treasury, to as low as 5.85 percent—precisely when the economy was achieving lift-off. Maybe the Fed simply took too much comfort in the low yield of the long bond, which in retrospect was grossly overvalued, and not enough attention to its own statistics, which showed that it should be raising federal funds before the economy shifted into high gear. By the time the Fed realized what it had done, the juggernaut could not be slowed by the usual quarter-point increments that this Fed chairman favors.

Strangely, it's not consumer price inflation that prompted the shift in Fed strategy. In fact, consumer-level prices remain subdued; if the Fed were reacting to the consumer price index, we wouldn't have had a single rate increase yet. Rather, the Fed is watching commodity prices and dollars paid per hours worked, two reliable indicators of future inflation.

As the strong economy caught most of American industry flat-footed, there has been tremendous pressure on business to build inventories of raw goods with which to make product. The ethylene, aluminum, box-board and pulp industries—the pulse of manufacturing America—had been cut back too severely after years of lagging demand to meet the surge of consumer spending. At the beginning of 1994 there simply was not enough capacity to meet the demand inspired by the low rates. The Fed adopted the strategy of small rate hikes, hoping to brake the economy just enough to give time for the Dow Chemicals and the Alcoas to bring on more mills or expand factories. But the demand, particularly from auto companies, the largest factor in the U.S. economy, swamped the manufacturers' abilities and took all the slack out before the Fed knew what was happening.

The auto companies, always the worst at measuring their own markets, had just finished the greatest retrenchment in their history, idling factories and workers by the thousands, at exactly the time when demand began to soar. Their frantic attempt to meet demand has led to just the kinds of long work weeks, overtime and commodity stockpiling that the Fed most fears.

Sadly, just when the Fed pulled out the sledgehammer, its previous rate hikes already had begun to daze the economy; gold prices had been slumping, commodity prices slipping, hourly wages falling. Just when the Fed is depriving the auto companies and banks of the ability to make low-interest loans, the auto compa-

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nies have finally built up their inventories. Just when the adjustable rate mortgages have gotten too high for most consumers, the housing companies have built more homes than they can sell. And just when the consumer faces a higher interest rate bill on charge cards, spending has apparently slowed—right in time to leave stores overstocked at Christmas. In short, just when the economy was about to go in for a soft landing, the Fed pushed down on the throttle with reckless abandon.

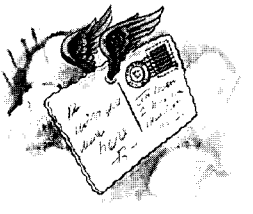
JAMES J. CRAMER is president of Cramer & Company, a money-management firm.

DAMASCUS POSTCARD

BRUSHED ASSAD

By Fred Barnes

For an audience with President Hafez al-Assad of Syria, you're taken up a steep hill on a wide, traffic-free road to the presidential palace, which sits, isolated, overlooking Damascus. It was built in 1989 (Japanese architect, Saudi financing) as Assad's home, only he doesn't live there. It's easy to see why. The palace, heroic in scale, has the look of an oversized junior high school. Now it is used solely for ceremonial events. The front door opens into a hallway resembling the set of a Cecil B. De Mille movie. The ceiling is high, the hallway as long as a football field, and Assad stands in the distance, at the end of red carpet and just inside the door of the room where he meets small delegations. My group, organized by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, consisted of six people. After we sat down, I pulled out my tape recorder. Assad didn't appear to mind, but a couple of minutes later an anxious aide walked over and snatched it. "Please, no," he said. I figured the guy was a bodyguard. He turned out to be the chief of protocol.



Assad is 64, thin and suffering from diabetes and heart trouble. His son and heir apparent, Basil, was killed in a car wreck last January. He faces the prospect of being odd man out as peace spreads among Israel's Arab neighbors. Still, the Syrian leader seems in no hurry to sign a treaty with Israel. In our session on December 4, he chuckled, grinned and bantered. He complained half-seriously that the United States has too many elections and too few experienced leaders. Since Joseph Sisco, the former undersecretary of state and deputy to Henry Kissinger, was in the group, Assad told a story and a few jokes about Kissinger. He also noted journalists are "human beings." That was reassuring.

Assad feels none of the urgency that prompted Anwar Sadat, Yasir Arafat and King Hussein of Jordon to settle with Israel. Why should he? President Clinton rewarded Assad's intransigence by visiting Damascus for more than four hours of talks on October 27. Then, Assad was more concerned with making sure Clinton could claim progress in the Syrian-Israeli peace process than with actually assuaging the Israelis. Assad gave Clinton two tidbits—he'd give Israel more time to vacate the Golan, and he'd consider resuming direct talks. Though Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin dismissed these, Assad says Israel must offer concessions now. "There is not only one ball but many balls in Israel's court," he told us.

Reuters reported that "diplomats" believed Assad's comments to us were "an encouraging sign," coming two days before Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived in Damascus. I don't know why diplomats thought that. They weren't in the room. No one in my group was "encouraged." As best I could tell, American officials are correct in thinking Assad regards peace with Israel as desirable but not necessary. Negotiations with Israel "remain at point zero," he said without lament. The pressure to compromise has slackened for several reasons. He no longer has to maintain war footing against Israel. The military option is gone now that there is no superpower backing him. His economy is improving. The military seems happy.

Assad recoils at the idea of direct talks with Rabin. He rejects the theory that principals can, in a summit meeting, make dramatic progress. "In reality, that just doesn't happen," he insisted. What's worse, Assad added, is that "when a misunderstanding takes place between the leaders of two countries, it could be very difficult to undo." He repeated a story Kissinger had told him two decades ago. In peace talks in Paris, the Vietnamese delegate spoke the first day and Kissinger was supposed to speak on the second. But the Vietnamese diplomat demanded to speak the second day, too. "Please, do," Kissinger said. "You're a liar," the Vietnamese said. Kissinger waited for more, but the delegate said, "That's it." Kissinger then gave his speech. "I believe [he] behaved with courtesy, but how many can behave this way?" Assad didn't explain the story beyond that, but I took it to mean that talks can collapse if leaders are insulted, while underlings can brush off slurs and proceed.

Assad isn't interested in a direct secret channel for communicating with Rabin, either. American officials proposed this to him, but he dismissed it as an unacceptable concession. Instead, Assad wants the United States, namely Clinton and Christopher, to carry his messages to Rabin as the whole world watches. The president said his foreign minister, Farouk al-Shara, shouldn't have told my group to take a message to the Israelis. (That message was: "It is their turn to respond privately.") Assad said he wouldn't send a message by unofficial mediators. "If I were to give you a message, what is going to be left for the secretary of state?"

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There's a contradictory aspect to Assad's relations with the United States. If his goal is to enlist the United States as Syria's superpower patron, replacing the Soviet Union, he has a funny way of going about it. Assad only takes half-steps that never quite satisfy American officials. He wants Syria removed from the State Department's list of countries that sponsor terrorism. But while some terrorists have left the country, he declines to deport the worst perpetrators of terrorism, George Habash and Ahmad Jabril. The best Western diplomats can say about Syria is that, as far as they know, it has not carried out any state-sponsored terrorism in the West since 1986. That's not enough to get it off the list.

For the moment, the fondest dream of the administration is for Assad to conduct diplomacy aimed at Israeli public opinion. If Assad would just make peace noises, Israelis would soften on Syria and Rabin would be freer to compromise—that's the theory anyway. Assad doesn't buy it. "Each of us is responsible for dealing with [public opinion] in his own manner in his own country," he told us. "If you can't lead your own people, what's the meaning of being a leader?" The question was rhetorical.

The few times Assad and Shara agreed to engage in public diplomacy, the results were disastrous. While in Washington in October, Shara was interviewed on Israeli T.V. He was prepped by Dennis Ross, an aide to Christopher. The interview went well until he denied that Syria had shelled Israeli settlers from the Golan Heights, which Syria held before the 1967 war. This falsehood drew a hostile reaction in Israel. Assad fared even worse at his press conference in Damascus following talks with Clinton. He agreed beforehand to denounce the killing of innocent civilians wherever it occurs. This was a sensitive point in Israel because a bus filled with passengers had just been blown up by terrorists. Clinton, in fact, coached Assad in exactly what he'd say. But when asked about terrorism, Assad turned defensive, defying anyone to prove Syria had participated in terrorism. He didn't mention innocent civilians. Clinton had to jump in and put words in Assad's mouth. "We do not, we cannot and we will not support the killing of innocent civilians, and President Assad has said it repeatedly and said to me, I mean today, that he thought that was wrong as well, wherever it occurred, whether in the bus incident or in Hebron." Afterward, Clinton was livid. But it could have been worse. Assad could have said what he told us: terrorism and human rights are mere "phrases now in fashion." He likened those who raise them to people who play the same record over and over.

Assad leaves no chance for Syrians to forget who is in charge. There are pictures of him everywhere. At the war museum, there's one of Assad amid balloons and roses. At the Jordanian border, he's holding binoculars. The caption: "WE ♥ ASSAD." Recently, billboards with his face and peace slogans were installed on the highway from the airport. Assad said he had no idea how they got there. "I didn't put them up. I swear to God." On the other hand, he didn't order them taken down. •

A new idea for the NAACP

END OF THE RAINBOW

By Benjamin Wittes

In his quest to make the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People relevant and modern, Benjamin Chavis nearly drove it into complete irrelevance. The organization's separation from its former leader is now final, and its board has begun the search for his replacement. But the question Chavis placed before the civil rights movement remains unanswered: Can a mainstream organization address the concerns of black America in an era in which the civil rights struggle has given way to a morass of muddier issues? Can the group move beyond civil rights issues to the economic ones that now demand attention?

The battle over Chavis's ouster was not exclusively ideological, but neither was it merely a tussle over Mary Stansel's lawsuit, which charged the organization's leader with sex discrimination. In his brief tenure, Chavis had angered many on the NAACP's sixty-four-member board and among the group's membership: labor activists, by his support for NAFTA without board approval; the mainstream, by courting Louis Farrakhan and other radicals; and just about everyone, by turning a budget surplus into a nearly $4 million deficit within eighteen months. Chavis was fired not only because of his fiscal ineptitude—which has prompted draconian budget cuts and desperate fund-raising appeals—and contempt for the board, but also because his radical vision for the organization was more disquieting than its board had anticipated.

The debacle reflected the lack of direction that has afflicted the nation's most august civil rights organization since the mid 1970s. The NAACP once embodied black power while rejecting racial rhetoric. Now it is torn between an integrationist old guard and radicals of Chavis's ilk. The board's most coherent ideology is nothing more than obedience to its chairman, William F. Gibson, a Greenville, South Carolina, dentist—who, according to his detractors on the board, controls a block of thirty-plus votes, often with strong-arm tactics.

Much of Chavis's critique of the organization was on target. He and his followers weren't wrong to argue that the NAACP had become a guardian of middle-class black interests with no vision for the inner city. And though he prescribed the wrong medicine for the civil rights movement's ills and was not above demagoguery in doing so, Chavis exposed the lethargy of the previous administration. The NAACP itself was ailing long before Ben Chavis, and his departure hasn't cured it.

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At bottom, the NAACP never progressed beyond the era when race issues were simple matters of civil rights. During the 1950s and '60s, the organization helped design and carry out a strategy of mass action, protests, lobbying and marches to destroy segregation. This strategy, based on the stark, morally unambiguous reality of racial oppression, viewed local government as the instrument of civil rights abuse and the federal government as its remedy. The approach targeted legalized segregation, and Jim Crow melted in a decade; but it translated poorly into the next era. The problems facing black Americans today, though they find their source partly in racism and discrimination, do not emanate directly from identifiable public policies or boil down to the enforcement of constitutional rights. Mass protests designed to evoke moral outrage and federal intervention no longer address these woes. Black political demands—say, for affirmative action or forced busing—are not as unambiguously persuasive as the fights for voting rights and integrated public accommodations; on the contrary, black ambitions, to many whites, seem to demand sacrifices, either through taxes or compromised job opportunities. The civil rights strategy isn't persuading anybody anymore. If the NAACP is ever again to be the vanguard of black advancement, it needs to embrace an approach that more directly confronts the problems blacks have today.

These problems hardly need reiteration. Many black urban communities lack capital, vibrant community institutions, the rule of law and basic human safety. None of these deficiencies begs a morally obvious policy solution, and none would be addressed by fully enforcing every American's constitutionally guaranteed civil rights. As the federal government has become less willing to bail out local communities, it has become increasingly anachronistic for the NAACP to view the federal government as its savior—yet it continues to do so.

The NAACP has shown a remarkable unwillingness to address the economic and community development questions that should be its primary focus. It prefers high-profile, symbolic fights such as the battle over the Confederate flag in South Carolina and Georgia. These issues the NAACP can handle easily—and seize the moral high ground on—without rethinking questions of strategy. But, as NAACP Economic Development Director Fred Rasheed points out, such symbolic questions don't affect the day-to-day lives of many people. "I'm not saying that the Confederate flag isn't important," says Rasheed, "but sometimes ... substance is more important than symbolism." To be sure, the NAACP also does important nitty-gritty civil rights work on job and housing discrimination issues that do affect people's lives, but even these issues are today less critical than regrounding urban communities.

The worst offenders in refusing to consider economic questions are the civil rights old guard. For these classic integrationists, economic development has simply not been a priority. Michael Meyers, a former NAACP assistant director who now directs the New York Civil Rights Coalition, even dismisses it as inimical to civil rights: "I think that a primary focus on economic development of the African American community is a gesture of separatism, of gilding the ghetto, which I think again is a foolish and shortsighted strategy. I believe in integration." Meyers believes as a matter of principle that the NAACP should remain race-blind. This conviction caused him to stand virtually alone among major civil rights figures in opposing Chavis's flirtation with Farrakhan. But his position on economic development is simplistic. It's not separatist to recognize that many urban areas have become overwhelmingly black. Short of depopulating cities and moving urban blacks to Iowa, hopes for Meyers's variety of integration are nil.

The NAACP, rhetorically at least, acknowledges community development as a priority, but it frames the issue as another civil rights battle. When it addresses the question of economic development, it tends to fall back on its view of the federal government as the guarantor of black advancement. It still acts as though it expects a massive government intervention in the inner city, a notion that, in the current fiscal climate, borders on fantasy.

Chavis came aboard in April 1993 promising to make "economic empowerment" central, and though he talked about it a good deal, he actually did almost nothing. Under his administration, according to Rasheed, funding for the NAACP's few self-starting economic development programs actually declined slightly. Chavis was also married to civil rights rhetoric and thinking. In the introduction to the NAACP's 1993 Annual Report, Chavis wrote, "The American economy is a racially segregated economy." His proposed solution was a crazy quilt of virtually every civil rights or rhetorical cliché: "Let the word go from this place that the NAACP will not rest, will not flinch, will not retreat and will not abdicate our historic birthright and present responsibility to lead the charge, to desegregate the American economy."

To be effective again, the NAACP will have to recast itself as an economic and community development organization. A shadow of the NAACP's potential already exists within its current economic development programs. Operation Fair Share, under Rasheed's direction, has gotten sixty major companies to agree to employ and promote minorities and to reinvest in the black communities that patronize them. These companies include such notorious discriminators as Coors and Denny's. Fair Share has its problems. Robert Woodson, who heads the Washington, D.C.-based National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, points out that it doesn't address inner-city issues directly but, by focusing on bringing blacks into management and promoting them, the program primarily benefits those who want "to move from a $50,000 job to a $100,000 job." But even he admits that it has been effective. Still more impressive is the Community Development Resource Center (CDRC), an NAACP program in partnership with NationsBank and US BanCorp. Designed to help new minority businesses get capital and technical help, the program currently has seven cen-

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NPG Statement on Population

We Believe that the Optimum Rate of Population Growth is Negative

We believe that the optimum **rate** of population growth for the United States (and for the world) is **negative** until such time as the **scale** of economic activity, and its environmental effects, are reduced to a level that would be sustainable indefinitely.

We are convinced that if present rates of population and economic growth are allowed to continue, the end result, within the lifetimes of many of us, would inevitably be near universal poverty in a hopelessly polluted nation and world.

We agree with Professor Herman Daly who has pointed out that the human economy is a subset of the biosphere, and that **the current scale of economic activity relative to the biosphere is already far too large to be sustainable indefinitely**.

Stabilization Is Not Enough

We believe that calls for merely slowing down rapid population growth, or for stabilizing population at present or even higher levels, **are totally inadequate**.

Such proposals, while presented as a solution, **fail to address the central issue**: how to create a national (and world) economy that will be sustainable indefinitely.

At present or at even higher levels of population, neither the application of science and technology, nor simplifying life-styles, nor any combination of the two, can offer any hope of reducing our impact on the environment to a sustainable level.

We Need a Smaller Population

We recognize that our impact on the environment in terms of pollution and resource depletion is the product of our numbers times our per capita consumption of energy and materials. Thus, there are only three ways by which that impact can be reduced:

- By reducing the size of our population by a negative rate of population growth.
- By reducing over consumption (in the United States and other developed countries) by simplifying life-styles.
- By reducing resource depletion and pollution per unit of consumption through more efficient use of energy and materials.

Population size is by far the most critical of those three variables. **Nevertheless, our present scale of economic activity is so large relative to the biosphere that all three measures are needed in order to reduce it to a sustainable level.**

An Urgent Need

Over 20 years ago, when our U.S. population was far smaller, (about 202 million, rather than our present 260 million), Professor John Holdren correctly saw the urgent need for a negative rate of population growth. At that time he wrote,

"...What is surprising...is that there is not more agreement concerning what the rate of change of population size should be. For given the uncertain, but possibly grave, risks associated with substantially increasing our impact on the environment, and given that population growth aggravates or impedes the solution of a wide variety of other problems...it should be obvious that the optimum **rate** of population growth is zero or negative until such time as the uncertainties have been removed and the problems solved."

A Population Goal for Our Country

We must have, first of all, a nationally-determined population goal for our country, accompanied by effective policies to achieve it.

We urge Congress and President Clinton to set, as a top priority national goal, **the achievement of a negative rate of population growth for the United States until such time as the scale of our economic activity is reduced to a sustainable level.**

We also call on our political leaders to urge other nations to pursue a similar goal.

It would be relatively easy for the U.S. to achieve a negative rate of population growth. But to do so we must first be willing to address the only two factors that cause our present growth; fertility and immigration.

If almost all couples had no more than two children, and if we reduced immigration to not over 200,000 a year, our population would soon stop growing and then begin a gradual decline before stabilizing by the end of the next century at a sustainable level of around 150 million.

By contrast, we are now heading rapidly toward disaster. Our population growth is destroying us. If present rates of fertlity and immigration were to continue,our U.S. population would grow to 500 million or more by the end of the next century.

by Donald Mann, President

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ters, which have collectively dished out roughly $30 million in loans. Operation Fair Share and the CDRC both predate Chavis's tenure, and he gave them surprisingly little support given his rhetorical emphases.

The main problem with these development programs is that they're so small. Rasheed estimates that the organization spends only 15 percent of its annual budget on economic initiatives, a figure he believes should be higher, given that the economic development program is widely acknowledged to be among the NAACP's most effective. In a positive sign, Rasheed was appointed NAACP interim administrator following Chavis's ouster. At least until a new executive director is found, Rasheed is second only to National Field Secretary Earl Shinhoster, who was appointed interim senior administrator.

Outside the NAACP, various community development organizations operate in isolation from one another. Since 1973, for example, the Shorebank in Chicago has dispensed housing rehabilitation loans to neighborhood residents who wanted to buy, restore and operate apartment buildings. The bank, largely on its own, has arrested the decline of the struggling neighborhood by providing capital, vision and guidance to would-be entrepreneurs and landlords.

The NAACP, with its 2,200 chapters, hundreds of thousands of members and multi-million-dollar budget, could foster the growth of many such self-starting institutions. Through its chapter network, says sociologist Charles Derber, it could "canvass [its] communities and get reports on what's working and what's the most promising array of possibilities, and highlight and publicize them." According to Derber, the NAACP also could rank these institutions for funding and emulation and help ensure their continuation.

Volunteerist initiatives alone can't cure urban ills. The capital required to make a difference is huge, and government would have to provide some of it. In soliciting government aid, however, the NAACP must command the wide respect it once possessed. Rather than appearing a lackluster collection of do-nothings asking the government to solve community problems for them, the organization should appear committed to solving black America's problems on its own, if need be. Were the NAACP to recast itself as a cutting-edge community development organization with an open eye toward public-private partnership, its requests for government aid would not be viewed so contemptuously by average Americans.

Of course, those blacks who argue that civil rights must give way to community development are totally outside the NAACP and have limited constituencies. Shelby Steele and Woodson appeal more to whites than to blacks. With civil rights thinking so entrenched in the NAACP, the only acceptable critiques of the organization seem to be those, like Chavis's, that brand it as insufficiently radical and argue for an extension of its basic errors.

BENJAMIN WITTES is a reporter for *Legal Times*.

And back to the 1890s.

OUT OF AFRICA

By Peter Beinart

Western policy toward Africa began as a private affair. In the nineteenth century, explorers, missionaries and traders directed Europe's relations with the continent. Government representatives stayed at home. While individuals and private organizations saw a continent of great spiritual, material and cartographic importance, their leaders held to the belief that, politically, Africa was irrelevant.

During the 1870s and 1880s this changed. Indifference gave way to a frenzied scramble for territory. The 1884 Berlin Conference, which divided Africa among the European powers, ushered in a century during which Western governments used the continent as a field on which to play out their rivalries. This continued during the cold war. Today, however, with Western governments disengaging, the nineteenth-century model has returned. Convinced that Africa has no impact on the rest of the globe, First World governments are ceding control to aid agencies and lending institutions. Though this epochal shift has hardly been noticed in the United States and Europe, it is wreaking havoc in Africa.

During the 1880s Africa became a safety valve for conflicts among the great powers. Germany's emergence as a continental hegemon forced Britain to abandon its traditional independence and join a blocking coalition with France and Russia. Europe was locked into two opposing camps. The great powers could not pursue advantage without risking all-out war. Africa gave them freedom to maneuver. It provided an arena in which they could seek strategic benefit without provoking a major conflict. Governments replaced private organizations as the primary agents of Europe's relations with the continent.

During the 1960s Africa served a similar function. Europe was again divided into two hostile blocs, and minor conflicts, such as those over the occupation of Berlin, threatened to spark an explosion. As it had in the 1880s, Africa became a safe playground for competition. The principle that Africa was not worth a European war, which Britain and France established in Sudan in 1898, was reaffirmed in the Congo in 1960 by the United States and the Soviet Union.

Today, the global struggle among North America, Europe and Japan is economic. It's not surprising, then, that the world's powers see no advantage in a

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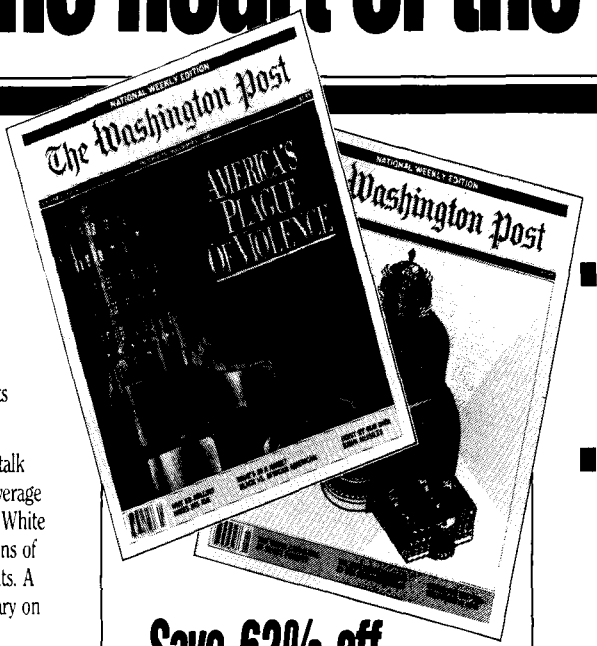

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continent whose average return on investment is 2.5 percent (compared with 22.4 percent in South Asia and more than 30 percent in East Asia). In 1991 the amount of external financing through bonds directed to East Asia was $2.4 billion. For South Asia, it was $1.9 billion. For Africa, it was zero. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for only 1.4 percent of world trade.

Western governments have no significant interests on the continent. To finance new embassies in the former Soviet Union, the State Department cut its Africa operations by 9 percent, and the Agency for International Development has reduced its Africa staff by one-fifth. "I have a hard time justifying expenditures in most of the African continent," says Republican Senator Mitch McConnell, the incoming chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Aid. "I know they have enormous problems, but I have a hard time finding a national interest." Withdrawal is also occurring in the European Community, which now sends the bulk of its aid to the former Soviet bloc.

Africa policy—with the exception of South Africa—has been abandoned by all of the world's major governments. The vacuum has been filled by two different types of organizations: the Bretton Woods lending institutions and the international aid agencies.

The United States and Britain created the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1944 to provide relief for countries with temporary balance-of-payments crises. The fund assumed a major role in African development in the early 1970s, after oil shocks and declining prices for agricultural exports created large trade deficits in many African countries. The IMF responded with short-term, relatively high-interest loans. When export prices continued to fall, however, African governments couldn't pay the money back. The IMF has been with them ever since.

The fund's real power has come with the disengagement of Western governments. During the cold war, African leaders had options. The USSR and the United States distributed foreign aid in return for ideological support. (The West generally pressured the bank and the fund to lend to anti-Communist favorites.) With the Soviet Union gone, there is little reason for Western donors to finance African dictators. Today, the multilateral institutions set the agenda, and their criteria are economic rather than political.

First World governments rarely lend to countries that lack IMF and World Bank approval. France, which has maintained a uniquely close relationship with its former colonies, was the last holdout. Yet early this year it bowed to IMF and World Bank pressure and devalued the French-backed CFA franc by 50 percent. As former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere said in a recent interview, "When we reject IMF conditions we hear the threatening whisper: 'Without accepting our conditions ... you will get no other money.' "

These conditions have become much more stringent. In the mid 1980s the IMF and World Bank began conditioning new loans on the adoption of structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which seek to foster export-led growth by devaluing currencies, privatizing government-owned parastatals, ending food subsidies and cutting bureaucracies.

The SAPs possess an economic logic. For years, African governments overvalued their currencies, subsidizing imports and crippling their farmers' ability to compete internationally. As a result, between 1970 and 1990 the continent's share of agricultural exports fell from 17 percent to 8 percent. Ghana, which has stuck to the SAP reforms, has registered significantly higher growth rates than its neighbors. For twenty years population growth outstripped food production; now that trend has been reversed in SAP countries.

The IMF and World Bank have gotten the economics right, but the politics dangerously wrong. Structural adjustment destabilizes the governments that embrace it. Laying off state workers and lifting subsidies on food has led to strikes, protests and riots. In countries where this opposition has been integrated into larger movements for democracy, such as Zambia, Benin and Madagascar, dictators have fallen peacefully. Interestingly, despite their populist rhetoric, the newly elected democratic governments in these countries have persevered with the SAPs.

In countries where popular outrage has not assumed a democratic character—Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leone—the results have been disastrous. Dictators have fallen violently, but the rebels who have toppled them have not been able to consolidate power. This is largely because the cold war aid that allowed previous dictators to maintain networks of patronage and repression no longer exists. New would-be tyrants can no longer buy the support of the military. Armies have fragmented, often along ethnic lines, and states have collapsed. The anarchy that reigns in Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leone is far worse than the tyranny that preceded it.

The problem with allowing the IMF and World Bank to direct Africa policy is that they destabilize governments without promoting democracy. The conditions for assistance are purely economic. Technocratic and mechanistic by nature, the multilateral lenders boast that their work is "apolitical." Not surprisingly, their officials often prefer dealing with authoritarian governments. In the words of a leading World Bank researcher, Deepak Lal, the regimes that best promote SAPs are "courageous, ruthless and perhaps undemocratic." According to Nigerian political scientist Claude Ake, IMF officials "seem quite indifferent to the political consequences of their good intentions."

The other institutions that have grown dramatically to fill the void left by Western governments' retreat from Africa are humanitarian aid agencies such as Oxfam, CARE, the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières. In 1989 there were forty-eight international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) registered with the United Nations. Today there are 1,300.

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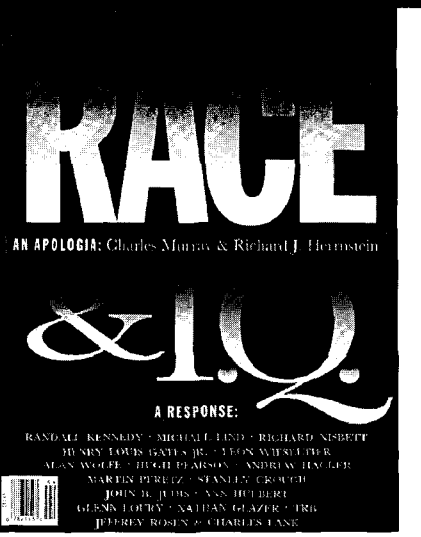

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As with the Bretton Woods lenders, the cold war's end has granted the NGOs vast influence over Western policy. This is particularly true during crises, when aid workers and journalists collaborate to bring remote tragedies to the consciences of the industrialized world. In the past, when relief groups publicized famines such as those in Biafra and Ethiopia, Western governments filtered their message through a cold war lens. U.S. interests in supporting the pro-Western Nigerian government in the late 1960s, or opposing Mengistu Haile Mariam's Marxist government in Ethiopia in 1984, limited the influence of NGO pleas. Today, however, their influence is unrivaled.

Take Somalia. As it collapsed in 1991 and 1992, the West watched fatalistically. Somalia's geopolitical irrelevance was accepted without debate. Political pressure produced by international aid agencies sparked the American intervention, which was designed mainly to protect Western relief operations. The Somalia scenario was, in many ways, a throwback to the nineteenth century, when missionaries journeyed into the African interior to fight spiritual and material suffering. Finding themselves imperiled and overwhelmed, they rallied domestic public opinion and shamed their governments into intervening militarily to protect their civilizing work.

During the 1880s and 1890s, however, European governments fought wars and established protectorates in order to carry this out. In Somalia, by contrast, the white man's burden was not worth a handful of casualties. The initial talk of recolonization provoked by the intervention quickly dissipated. The Somalia experience was the first, and almost certainly the last, Western effort at African political reconstruction. France's recent involvement in Rwanda is a case in point. A few years ago France would have intervened to protect a friendly francophone government. This year it responded to aid agency pleas with a brief humanitarian action, but stayed aloof from the country's political crisis.

In the absence of other Western interests in Africa, NGOs will continue to play an important role in directing government aid and setting policy. Indeed, USAID now distributes 20 percent of its budget for Africa through NGOs. Yet their power compounds the problems caused by the IMF and World Bank. Like the multilateral lending institutions, they often hinder democracy and unwittingly contribute to social collapse.

Aid agencies operate with the consent of host governments. They claim to be apolitical, but their need for government approval often leads them to condone, or even participate in, the corrupt networks and repressive strategies of African dictators. This is exactly what happened in Somalia in the 1980s, when NGOs complied with the policies that decimated civil society and sowed clan hatred—leading eventually to the civil war that followed Mohamed Siad Barre's fall in 1991. Only a small Australian agency called Community Aid Abroad spoke out. It left the country in protest against Siad Barre's human rights record in 1989.

As Rakiya Omaar and Alex de Wall, former co-directors of Africa Watch, observe, "The conquest of famine in India and in a handful of African countries such as Botswana was based on democratic accountability. In these countries, famine is a political issue.... This is the opposite of the apolitical 'humanitarian' message of international relief agencies." Harvard economist Amartya Sen takes this argument further, suggesting that a free press is crucial in spreading information about food shortages and in preventing mass starvation. The overwhelming evidence suggests that aid agencies do not prevent famine; democracy does.

The aid agencies and the multilateral lending institutions don't much like each other. One sees Africa's salvation in monetarist economics and the other in grass-roots philanthropy. But they share one central, and disastrous, assumption. Both believe that the question of African development is not, at its core, political. In this belief they again mirror the missionary societies of the nineteenth century, which were so intent on bringing economic and social development to Africa that they did not notice the political upheaval they caused in the process.

We may be seeing such upheaval again. The continent's postcolonial dictators are fast becoming extinct. In their wake, two types of African states have emerged. In a few countries—Malawi, Benin, Madagascar, Mali—dictators have been replaced by fledgling democratic governments. In an equal number—Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone—they have been replaced by chaos. It's too early to tell what the model will be, though, for Africa's giants—Nigeria, Kenya, Zaire—have not yet cast their dice. If democrats replace Sani Abacha, Daniel arap Moi and Mobutu Sese Seko, it will be a more hopeful sign for Africa's future than even the end of apartheid. If not? Imagine Rwanda, but in a country of 100 million people and dozens of major ethnic groups.

The multilateral lenders and aid agencies are contributing to that nightmare scenario by failing to support pressures for peaceful, democratic change. Their work must be directed by governments focused on strengthening Africa's capacity for democratic government. This means investing in democratic institutions within African civil society and taking steps to ensure that Africa's remaining dictators fall peacefully. It means, in the words of Ake, "tak[ing] democracy as seriously in Africa as everywhere else."

It is no longer enough to send troops to help aid agencies combat humanitarian crises. It is not even enough to send neutral observers to cool tempers before a crisis erupts. The governments of the West must realize that in Africa today, state breakdown and civil collapse are no longer aberrations. They are a logical outgrowth of the political status quo. Africa's choice is no longer between democracy and dictatorship. It is between democracy and anarchy.

PETER BEINART, a former TNR reporter-researcher, is currently a Rhodes Scholar.

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Karol Wojtyla's philosophical journey.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

By Kevin Wildes

Since the close of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has struggled, in public, about how it should move: forward into the modern world or backward to the austere certitude of the past. In 1979, when an obscure Polish cardinal was elected pope, it seemed as if a decision had been made in favor of the past. And in the years since, the former Karol Wojtyla has been portrayed—with some reason—as an arch-reactionary. But he is, in fact, something far more complex than that. His theology, as it emerges in his life's writings, is strikingly modern, more rooted in nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophy than anything else. Indeed, it may even be the very modernism of his theology that has led him into the ecclesiastical authoritarianism for which he is more renowned.

How this happened is an interesting twentieth-century story. Wojtyla's central philosophical identity is rooted in what is known as the method of "phenomenology." This off-putting term translates into a relatively simple idea: it is that one can come to understand the truth of something not simply by reference to the authority of science, or revelation, or dogma, but by "moving around" it, experiencing it from different perspectives and letting the reflections of each perspective communicate the truth of the object.

The central metaphor of such philosophy is "walking around." It is in this way that Wojtyla has consistently understood the Church. Amid dramatic changes, he has led it around and around its identity, traditions, central practices and beliefs. Hence also his constant travel around the world: it is part of his attempt to circle human experience, in the belief that there is an essential core that is normative for being human. That core is, for him, what defines authentic human existence. It is not a subjective matter, but a mission of objective discovery. In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul's recent encyclical on morality, he wrote, "The splendor of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator and in a special way in man, created in the image and likeness of God." The splendor of that truth can be found by a form of traveling, observing and circling. Theologically, in fact, Wojtyla hasn't led the Church forward or backward. He has led it in circles.

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Wojtyla's philosophical interests began in his earlier priestly formation and doctoral work in theology. In his pre-seminary years, as a worker and university student in Krakow, Wojtyla came under the spell of the underground priest Jan Tyranowski, a hero of the Polish church during the Nazi occupation. It was Tyranowski who, in his bid to revive a deeper spirituality among Poland's persecuted Catholics, introduced Wojtyla to the work of Spanish mystics such as John of the Cross, a sixteenth-century Carmelite monk who, with Teresa of Avila, led the Carmelite order in reform.

Steeped in this spirituality, Wojtyla presented himself in 1942 to Archbishop Sapieha of Krakow as a candidate for the seminary. Four years later, he was ordained as a priest and immediately packed off to Rome for doctoral studies in theology. The decision by Archbishop Sapieha to send Wojtyla was part of a plan to rebuild the Polish church intellectually after so many of its priests—more than 2,000—had been killed by the Nazis. In Rome, Wojtyla studied at the Angelicum, a college now called the Pontifical University of St. Thomas, and wrote his dissertation under the direction of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. Perhaps sensing the young priest's background, Lagrange directed Wojtyla to write on the problem of faith in the writings of John of the Cross.

The problem Wojtyla dealt with was that, in John's writings, faith seemed to lack any cognitive content. It was all mystical spirituality, no hard knowledge. But Wojtyla found both categories unsatisfying. Perhaps influenced by his early years in the political turmoil of occupied Poland, Wojtyla argued that faith was, above all, rooted in *experience*. In the experience of faith, the human being is transformed and participates in divine life. First highlighted in this 1950 treatise, *The Question of Faith in St. John of the Cross*, the importance of the category of experience came to be critical in all of Wojtyla's thought.

After his return to Poland, Wojtyla worked for a time in a parish. But in 1951, Sapieha, then a cardinal, insisted he work on a second doctorate, in order to qualify as a university teacher. This time, the thesis was on a less traditional subject. Completed in 1957, the

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dissertation's title is *An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing Christian Ethics on the Assumptions of Max Scheler's Philosophical System.*

Scheler was a phenomenologist who deployed Edmund Husserl's intuitive philosophy to discover a basis for ethics. Here, Wojtyla began to pin down exactly what "experience" could really mean. Scheler argued it was possible objectively to describe "ethical" states of consciousness. He claimed that many emotions—including those of moral values—had an objective basis, and that it was the objective attraction to the good—not the imposition of an "ought"—that moves us to moral action. But Wojtyla felt that Scheler's account of moral experience was insufficient, since moral experience is more than the experience of values: it is *acting* upon them. For Wojtyla, it was in the choice of action that all the various aspects of the moral life came together, that internal, philosophical experience and external moral experience intersected.

This concentration on action was in turn influenced by the work of Maurice Blondel, a turn-of-the-century Catholic philosopher who was best known, in his book *l'Action*, for exalting the role of the will. Blondel argued that philosophy must give an account of action rather than pure thought, an idea that recurs throughout Wojtyla's later work. In linking together the observation of objective moral values (Scheler) and the centrality of action in human morality (Blondel), Wojtyla had constructed the foundation of his ethics: the authentic, acting human person. This understanding of the person suggested not only how people ought not to be treated but also how they ought to be treated.

In his new book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Wojtyla explains his development this way: "So the development of my studies centered on man—on the human person—can ultimately be explained by my pastoral concern." But it was also affected by his political experience. His emphasis on the person is, in part, a reaction to totalitarian regimes that impoverished the mystery of the person in order to control people by the mechanisms of mass, centralized societies. In the face of first Nazi and then Soviet tyrannies, Wojtyla stressed the unique richness of each person. But he also emphasized that the person becomes a person because of community. In an address in Canada in 1984 he argued that "the human person lives in a community.... And with the community he shares hunger and thirst and sickness and malnutrition and misery.... In his own person the human being is meant to experience the needs of others." He refused to counter totalitarianism with the liberal individualism of the West.

An account of his view of the authentic nature of personhood came in his 1960 book, *Love and Responsibility*, in which Wojtyla deployed his phenomenonlogical method to pastoral ends. He argued that in the matter of love there are natural sexual desires and that "the natural direction of the sexual urge is toward a human being of the other sex." The moral order builds upon the natural order and transcends it. He writes that "the commandment to love is, as has been said, a form of the personalistic norm. We start from the existence of the person." The personalist norm "leads to the recognition of the principle of monogamy and the indissolubility of the marriage tie."

In defending this position, he later wrote: "I formulated the concept of a *personalist principle.* This principle is an attempt to translate the commandment of love into the language of philosophical ethics. *The person is a being for whom the only suitable dimension is love.* We are just to a person if we love him.... Love for a person *excludes the possibility of treating him as an object of pleasure....* It requires more; it requires the *affirmation of the person as person.*" He goes on to say, "Above all, the principle that a person has value by the simple fact that he is a *person* finds very clear expression: man, it is said by Vatican II, 'is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for his own sake.' " "Personhood" subsequently became a fixation. Wojtyla's next book, *Osobi i Czyn,* written in 1969 and republished and revised ten years later as *The Acting Person,* is devoted to the subject.

Throughout Wojtyla's intellectual development, the phenomenological framework is clear. Wojtyla as a theologian had not responded to modernity by retreating into reactionary certitude, or by reasserting dogma or a simple elaboration of Thomist natural law. He had explored belief with all the modern philosophical tools available. He brought to his faith the mysticism of John of the Cross, but had developed this with the thought of such modern thinkers as Blondel, Scheler and Husserl. Throughout, he was responding, as the Church was, to the fundamental problem of faith in a rationalist, amoral, scientific age. And like the Second Vatican Council, he did not seek to escape these facets of modernity, but to understand more fully their unique challenges to faith.

Truth was not simply a matter of revelation, or a blind leap of faith, or a self-evident product of nature. It was, according to Wojtyla, found by observation, observation as a reflection on *all* experience. It could be conducted from all sorts of angles; what seemed like contradictions—say the contradiction between faith and science—were actually different ways of looking at the same thing. Take the question of science's challenge to religious belief. Wojtyla, in a 1987 letter to Father George Coyne, director of the Vatican Observatory, saw science and religion forming "a *community of interchange.* Such a community of interchange encourages its members to expand their partial perspectives and form a unified vision." What's more, "science can purify religion from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into the wider world, a world in which both can flourish."

But this remarkable openness had its problems, too. By relying on phenomenology, Wojtyla also suffered from some of its more obvious difficulties. What if the different appearances of something don't fit together? What if, instead of coherence and connection, we get

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chaos and disjunction? What if science actually contradicts faith? What, to take another example, if the Church had changed its own doctrines, contradicting itself? One strategy is to gloss over the dissonance. In *Redemptor Hominis*, the 1979 encyclical on changes in Church doctrine, John Paul simply asserts the continuity of the Church yesterday and today. In *Dives in Misericordia*, written about the mercy of God, there is no struggle between the teachings of the Old and the New Testaments, merely the statement that "Christ reveals the Father within the framework of the same perspective and on ground already prepared, as many pages of the Old Testament demonstrate."

While Wojtyla *assumes* there is continuity, what happens when there is real conflict? In a world that is culturally diverse and morally pluralistic, it is not clear why men and women outside the community of believers should accept certain understandings of "authenticity" over others. Indeed, the development of practices such as free markets, limited democracies and informed consent are responses to pluralistic conceptions of authentic human experience. They are practices that convey moral authority when people hold different moral views. What did Wojtyla have in his arsenal to counter them? More important, what resources did John Paul have?

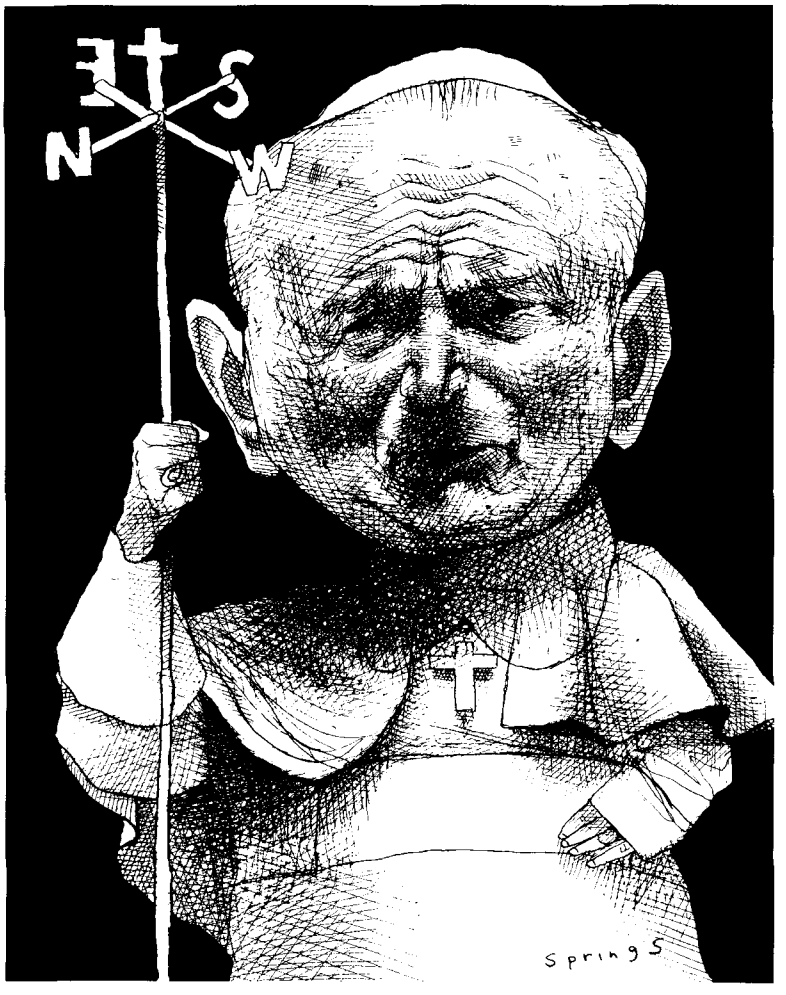

ILLUSTRATION FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC BY JOHN SPRINGS

In the letter on ordination and women, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, for example, John Paul was forced to address an issue that Wojtyla the theologian had few resources to solve. Here, authenticity wasn't a good enough argument. After all, who was to say which notion of the priesthood was more authentic than another? A phenomenologist might look at priestly roles in the Church and in society, observe how other cultures and churches have found sacerdotal roles for women; or notice the correlation between some theological views of the symbolism of women and the pastoralism of the priesthood. But none of this is evident in John Paul's edict. He quotes Pope Paul VI who wrote, "The real reason [for not ordaining women] is that, in giving the Church her fundamental constitution, her theological anthropology—thereafter always followed by the Church's tradition—Christ established things in this way." He simply lays down the law, arguing, it seems, that tradition is the primary way to decide what is authentic or inauthentic, what is true and what is false.

The truth is, phenomenology can only get you so far. A description of any phenomenon, no matter how objective, must start from somewhere. All descriptions embody certain presuppositions, biases and values of the observer. A visitor to a city may get two very different tours of the city from two separate friends. One friend may highlight the artistic centers of the city while the other may highlight the sporting attractions. Another still may notice its industry, or its architecture. The visitor is left with a question of how to determine which tour of the city reveals its authentic nature.

Wojtyla is aware of the problem, of course. His own writing provides an explanation of why there are such divergent interpretations of authenticity: human reason is limited while the phenomena of human existence are complex and rich. Without a common framework, accounts of authenticity will move in very different directions and reach very different conclusions. But who is to provide the common framework? The answer is not a surprise. When all else fails, Wojtyla appeals to the authority of revelation to pick out the normative account of humanity. And the arbiter of that authority turns out to be Wojtyla himself, in the person of the pope.

When talking to the world at large, John Paul II has simply invoked the authority of the Scriptures as interpreted by himself. This is certainly the strategy in his latest book. But the strategy was clear as early as 1979 in Puebla, Mexico, on a trip to meet with the bishops of Central America. In that meeting, John Paul proclaimed: "Faced with so many other forms of human-

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ism that are often shut in by a strictly economic, biological or psychological view of man, the Church has the right and duty to proclaim the truth about man that she has received from her Teacher, Jesus Christ."

Of course, this assertion of authority is not an innovation. But its stridency is notable. The irony is that when the phenomenologist Karol Wojtyla became pope, he simply asserted that the papacy's "authenticity" lay in its fiats. This turned out to be particularly true when the papacy addressed the internal matters of the Church itself. In these affairs, to be sure, the papacy has always exercised considerable authority. But this always has been in the context of many different levels of authority in its magisterial teachings. There are those teachings when the pope or Church council speaks ex cathedra or infallibly. This is the extraordinary teaching authority of the Church. There is also the ordinary papal magisterium, which, in principle, is open to development, change and reform.

But John Paul II seems to have created a new category of authentic papal teaching in both *Veritatis Splendor* and the letter on ordination. The claims made in those letters are not said to be infallible in a technical sense. Yet they are said to be regarded as definitive for all the faith and for all time. In the letter on ordination John Paul wrote that "in some places it [the ban on women's ordination] is nonetheless considered still open to debate, or ... to have merely disciplinary force." The implications of such views is that the ban can be changed. He goes on to write:

> In order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf Luke 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.

The theologian Francis Sullivan had perhaps the most succinct response to this innovation: "I can only conclude that claims are being made which, to my knowl-

Pope Fiction

The pope speaks. But *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* is a peculiar document. Each chapter opens with the journalist Vittorio Messori's questions, sometimes bold and querulous, sometimes obsequious and honorific in the Italian way—"Allow me to play, although respectfully, the gadfly." The pope then replies at length, his reflections moving impressionistically from the philosophical and theological to the historical and autobiographical. The didactic structure of Catholic catechism is thus reversed. During preparation for the sacrament of confirmation, for example, the preceptor asks, and the novice answers. But in John Paul II's book, the ultimate authority figure of church hierarchy submits to interrogation, a warping of tradition typical of a man whose kissing of airport tarmacs has dramatized his conviction that the pope is the servant of humanity.

I approached the pope's book as an atheist for whom Italian Catholicism is a rich ethnic identity rather than a religion. Catholic doctrine, particularly regarding sexuality and obedience to authority, has been troublesome to many members of my generation in America, and John Paul's reputation has become increasingly conservative. Thus, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* comes as a stunning display not of Catholic autocracy but of the ideological flexibility and rueful insight of the modern mind. Its complex sequence of wide-ranging meditations—on prayer and salvation, the existence of God, the uniqueness of Jesus, the permanence of suffering, the overcoming of fear through faith—establishes John Paul as an eloquent and erudite intellectual, struggling to bridge the gap between universal human longings and the bitter political realities of the twentieth century.

In literary terms, the voice of the book is intense and powerful, yet peculiarly distant and exalted. All hierarchs suffer the isolation of power. Reaching us from stone walls of the labyrinthine Vatican, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* resembles prison literature, in which physical immobility and sensory deprivation seem to intensify an author's power of language and originality of imagination. John Paul's captivity by rigid, royal protocol gives this book a distinct and affecting air of loneliness.

The former Karol Wojtyla, whose name honors his predecessor, John Paul I (who fused the names of *his* predecessors, John XXIII and Paul VI), has suffered an obliteration of personal identity in his higher function, the almost unimaginable burden of his election as pope, whom millions regard as the single living human closest to God. Hence the text oscillates between the first and third persons, sometimes in the same paragraph. "I," who privately takes pen in hand, had a father and homeland, but "he," the Supreme Pontiff on public view, is a nearly abstract being, the successor to Saint Peter, whose apostolic mission came from the lips of Jesus himself. It is a harrowing, mutilating privilege. Take this surreal example:

> As a young priest and pastor I came to this way of looking at young people and at youth, and it has remained constant all these years. It is an outlook which allows me to meet young people wherever I go. Every parish priest in Rome knows that my visits to the parish must conclude with a meeting between the Bishop of Rome and the young people of the parish. And not only in Rome, but anywhere the Pope goes, *he seeks out the young and the young seeks him out. Actually, in truth, it is not the Pope who is being sought out at all. The one being sought out is Christ* who knows "that which is in every man" (cf Jn 2:25), especially in a young person, and who can give true answers to his questions!

Wojtyla, the long-ago aspiring priest, melts into John Paul, the venerable Bishop of Rome, commander of many priests, who in turn swells into the world-traversing pope. But like a ghost, the latter suddenly vanishes into the Divine Being, Christ, whose vicar he is on earth and whom like all celebrants of Mass he literally impersonates in the Communion service (hence the ban on female priests). The passage is eerily chameleonic.

After the nihilism of poststructuralism and game-playing postmodernism, it is a relief to find the history of ideas treated in so respectful, cohesive and luminous a way. Stud-

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edge, have never been made about any document of ordinary papal teaching."

Anyone who deploys a phenomenological method must address at some point the problem of the circularity of the method. Every description is contextualized and relies on prior assumptions made by the describer. The describer must assume what is important to describe. Wojtyla's work does not escape this fundamental problem of phenomenology. It is particularly problematic for him when he encounters the pluralism and multiculturalism of many secular societies. Differences in cultures frequently signal different accounts over others. How can he break out of the circle? He does so simply by appealing to authority. And the more circular the reasoning, the cruder the authoritarianism.

In a public, pluralistic forum John Paul II has appealed to the authoritative content of God's revelation to say why some accounts are authentic and others are inauthentic. But *within* the Church, he has done something more radical. Throughout its life, the Church has contained a pluralism of spiritualities and interpretations of what it is to be authentically human and Christian. One has only to think of the different religious orders of the Church to find examples of different views of authenticity. In this context, John Paul II cannot rely on the authority of content since the revelation is shared by all believers. Instead he must appeal to the authority of office. It is by appeal to juridical authority that he must move to break the circle. Perhaps this is why, in what seems almost desperate fashion, the current pope has been making new and radical claims for papal authority, sometimes, it seems, each day. It is, after all, only God who enjoys the view from nowhere: the view without context or particularity. Only God escapes the circle of interpretation. In the last resort, perhaps, Pope John Paul II has grounded the authority of Karol Wojtyla's modern phenomenology in the ancient authority of God. •

ded with emphatic italicized phrases, the pope's book radiates with passion. Its central plot line, sketched with disarming simplicity, is a "struggle for the soul of the contemporary world." The dramatis personae in this Faustian combat are both living and dead. On one side is René Descartes and his modern progeny, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger. One hundred years after Descartes, John Paul asserts, European Christianity was already defeated: the French Revolution "tossed crucifixes in the street" and introduced "the cult of the goddess Reason." Today's Cartesians are the atheists and moral relativists of the "intellectual elite" who rule "the worlds of science, culture and media." On the other side are the warriors for Christ, beginning with Saint Paul, whose failed missionary visit to Athens illustrated the resistance of those trained in Greek "philosophical speculation" to the faith-based rigor of Christian "mystery." On the eternal battlefield of Western thought, Descartes' greatest opponent is Saint Thomas Aquinas, the medieval theologian John Paul believes to be unjustly neglected by the contemporary Church. He groups with Thomas other members of the Scholastic tradition, leading to John Henry Cardinal Newman, nineteenth-century Catholicism's most glamorous convert. With each recitation of the Nicene Creed at Mass, Catholics align themselves with this ancient lineage, for the words of the Creed are "nothing other than the reflection of Paul's doctrine."

The young are John Paul's hope. He writes feelingly of their needs and desires, of their "searching for the meaning of life." Remembering the "heroism" of his contemporaries, who "laid down their young lives" in the Warsaw uprising of 1944, he laments the predicament of today's young. "They live in freedom, which others have won for them, and have yielded in large part to the consumer culture." He asks, "What is youth?"—implicitly opposing the soul-centered Christian view to the pagan one. The Hellenophile Oscar Wilde, for example, celebrated the beauty of youth quite differently. It is this carnal strain in the West, heterosexual as well as homosexual, that John Paul protests when defining as unethical, and inconsistent with true love, the use of any person as "an object of pleasure."

And yet his own style is remarkably in tune with '60s sensibility. With its slow, trancelike rhythms and breathtaking vision, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* is nearly psychedelic. Its floating fantasia of ideas has the hallucinatory vividness of '60s expanded consciousness, calm, contemplative and psychologically disassociated. Its theater is hugely multicultural: John Paul makes Jesus confront Buddha and Muhammad and celebrates African and Asian animists for their sympathy to Christianity. Reopening staid establishment theology toward superstitious "populist piety," he accepts testimony about mystic coincidences and apparitions, particularly of Mary at Fatima and Jasna Góra. He rightly praises Mircea Eliade for showing how world anthropology has healed the break made by the Enlightenment between intellect and religion. True multiculturalism reveres the sacred.

The pope's persona is beyond sex, as conveyed by the dazzling purity of his white cassock and skull cap. He is a father-mother of shamanistic androgyny, a caring, contemplative, emanating being whose inconvenient body is merely a sensual entrapment or, as now, a living proof of human vulnerability to disease and death. As with worshipers of Plato's male-favoring Uranian Aphrodite, the pope's ancestry and affiliations are of the spirit rather than the flesh. Hence in this book he seems on charmingly intimate terms with the evangelists Luke and John and with Jesus himself, whom he calls, in a nearly Protestant way, "the only Friend" who walks beside us and will not disappoint. Real women, unfortunately, exist for John Paul only as celibate heroic saints or as dimly hallowed mothers in the obedient image of Mary. *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* is a book of transitions and new directions, but like much of current Catholic policy, it remains confounded by the pagan paradox of gender.

CAMILLE PAGLIA

Camille Paglia's third book, *Vamps & Tramps*, has just been published by Vintage.

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

A Veteran

In one respect Gérard Depardieu is the Georges Simenon of French film: he supplies more work than America can handle. Simenon produced novels so plenteously, the Maigret series and others, that, though French publishers rejoiced in them, American publishers had to pick and choose to avoid glutting the market. Depardieu, in a slow year, makes three pictures, too many for the U.S. market. Some of his films have never been shown here.

Of course not everything Depardieu does is at his best level. Unlike Simenon, who rarely wrote a clinker, Depardieu has fumbled from time to time. (I'm speaking only of the films that have been imported; the others I don't know.) In the poor ones he has usually relied on bluster, the oceanic energy that carries him along even when he is not really acting, as in *Camille Claudel* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*. But in very many pictures he has given acute performances that range awesomely in temper and that ring with every resource a talented actor can find in his imagination and body.

Consider: the anarchic hedonist in *Going Places*; the medieval peasant in *The Return of Martin Guerre*; the city man turned farmer in *Jean de Florette*; the ascetic, transfigured priest in *Under the Sun of Satan*; the ebullient yet shadowed hero of *Danton*—just a few from the Depardieu gallery. It's not leniency to infer that, in order to do his best work, he needs to do his lesser work. Prodigality is his mode of being: to pause and ponder for long stretches, as many leading actors do, would be to tamper with his artistic metabolism.

In a recent interview Emma Thompson, miraculous herself, said, "The essence of acting is concentration." This is not news (it has even been mentioned in this column), but it is simply, resoundingly true. The line lit up in my head at the first sight of Depardieu in the title role of his new film, made from Balzac's story **Colonel Chabert** (October Films). A wonderful, familiar double response thrilled through me. First, without any crevice for doubt, Chabert had arrived—a man, not an actor who had prepared. Second, it was Depardieu, *concentrating*. Once again he showed the power to transform himself at the same time that (which adds to the pleasure) we know it is Depardieu who is doing the transforming.

The year is 1817, the place a bustling law office in Paris. A knock at the door. A clerk opens. A heavy-set man stands there, his face grim with expectation of trouble. He wears a coachman's coat and the oddly shaped top hat of the day. The clerk asks him who he is.

"I am Colonel Chabert."
"Which Colonel Chabert?"
"The one who was killed at Eylau."

We're off. A man has returned from the ghastly Napoleonic battle ten years earlier, alive despite beliefs to the contrary, clearly intent on re-establishing his life against odds. No one in the audience is likely to yawn at this point. (Or later, in fact.)

Since the story is by Balzac, it is about money. Certainly he treated other subjects, but centrally, as the greatest novelist thus far of the risen bourgeoisie, he focused on that class's chief arena of engagement, its chief concern in family relationships as well as in business. Chabert wants to recover his money from the wife who inherited it and who, believing him dead, remarried. (Says V. S. Pritchett: "The struggle to recover an inheritance is a theme to which Balzac continually returned.")

Chabert's existence is an unpleasant shock to his widow, now Countess Ferraud, and her husband. The countess, extremely rich, likes lolling in luxury; and her wealth has been one of her attractions for the count, who relies on her money to help him to a peerage under Louis XVIII. So Chabert has first to establish his identity, then face the effort to bilk him.

His lawyer, Derville, who (oddly enough) is also the countess's lawyer, is nonetheless a fair man. Though he is ferociously busy, his days and nights consecrated to money deals, Derville has a cynical view of the post-Revolution, post-Napoleonic society in which he lives, a society in which honor has sunk very low on the list of priorities.

He is played by Fabrice Lucchini, one of those actors whose initial appearance promises little but whose skill and intelligence, rather than power, make them appealing. The count is André Dussolier, most recently seen as the husband in *Un Coeur en Hiver*. Another polished performer. (And what voices French actors have. One reason I'm against dubbing, though I don't really understand French or any foreign language, is that I enjoy

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Ladybird Ladybird. *Ken Loach's latest—about an unmarried London mother's fights to keep her children—is unsentimental but moving, unreservedly honest. (Reviewed 12/12/94)* **Pulp Fiction.** *Quentin Tarantino's much-hyped crime flick is worth some hype. He has rummaged through old crime thrillers and, often humorously, refurbished what he came up with. (11/14/94)* **Red.** *Under all the critical gas about the director, Krzysztof Kieslowski, there's a neatly turned piece of French irony, almost as good as Chabrol. About a young woman with love troubles, a crusty retired judge and some people around them. (12/19/94)* **Vanya on 42nd Street.** *A group of actors gathers in an abandoned Times Square theater for a run-through of "Uncle Vanya" and, under André Gregory's direction, provides a feast of beautiful acting. (11/7/94)*—**SK**

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listening to the actors.) Fanny Ardant, the countess, has been problematic for me, with greater self-confidence than self. But maturity is bringing her more color, more understanding. These qualities help her performance of a woman who, under the blandishments, is venal.

As for Depardieu, I'll cite only his last scene. He has given up the fight for his money, he has given up the money world. (Pritchett again: the colonel has decided "to return to beggary because of his contempt for the vulgar meanness of his wife.") He sits on a bench in a hospice, leans on his walking stick and remembers Eylau—which we have seen earlier and now revisit. His eyes speak for him. Balzac's story is about transition. He has no illusions about the passing chivalric age, which Eylau symbolizes: he knows its vanities and horrible cruelties. But it's the mercantile world that is swirling up around him, and it's the stench of that world that sickens him. Depardieu's Chabert comprehends all this.

Depardieu says that he wants to play the role of Balzac himself eventually. Speed the day. Perhaps that film can be directed by Yves Angelo, who directed here. Angelo, b. 1956, first took a degree in music, then studied film and worked for a long time as an assistant cameraman. He became a cinematographer and shot *Tous les Matins du Monde*, *Un Coeur en Hiver* and *Germinal*, among others. *Colonel Chabert* is his directing debut, and he was ready.

He understands movement and space—how to exploit small and large spaces—a crowded law office, a salon, a vast wintry battlefield after the battle. Angelo's cinematographer, Bernard Lutic, had the advantage of working for a man who knows precisely what he wants and knows how the camera can get it.

Angelo's musical background also enhances *Colonel Chabert*, reticently. Only chamber music is used. The Eylau scenes, with snow and dead men and dead horses, are silent except for a Beethoven trio, musing but not melting. Later, Mozart and Scarlatti and, with apt anachronism, Schubert and Schumann, add facets to this small gem of a film. •

Of Alms and the Woman

By Deborah A. Stone

Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare by Linda Gordon

(Free Press, 433 pp., $22.95)

When a friend of mine married in his mid-30s, a friend of his—we'll call the friend Michael—offered some unsolicited man-to-man advice. "If you are going to have children—and I think you should—there are three things you should do. First, have plenty of money. Second, don't have more than one. And third, hire a full-time nanny." Having a kid is a great experience, Michael assured him, but these rules must be heeded if you want to preserve your marriage and have a life.

Sure thing, I thought when my friend passed this advice along to me. If we could all live by Michael's rules, there might never have been a post-suffrage women's movement, unless it were a nannies' movement. In a world according to Michael, there would be no need for AFDC, either. Michael was willing to say what none of my female career-oriented friends dares think. We all joke about needing a wife, but none of us is ready to redraw our image of the family quite as drastically as Michael. You may have only one child? You must hire someone else to take care of it for you? If you are not rich, you should not have children?

It is not too far off the mark to say that Linda Gordon's book is a history of well-off professional people's advice for having kids and a life, too. The difference is that Michael was merely advising a friend, while Gordon's subjects—social welfare reformers, advocates and politicians—were trying to codify their advice into the rules of public programs.

Gordon's book is more of a study of ideas than a programmatic history of single women and welfare. Despite its subtitle, it is not about single mothers and welfare. Its subject is, rather, how reformers thought about poor single mothers. Three of its chapters are about the views of the white women's social welfare network, the black women's social welfare network (excluded from the white women's groups mostly by raw segregation), and the white male social insurance reformer network. I should note, too, that the book is not easy reading: the organizing principles within and across chapters are not clear and the narrative line is rarely sustained, so that it takes a lot of work to discern the overall story. Still, Gordon's reformer-centered perspective is an important original contribution and one that offers provocative insights into the current welfare reform debate.

Gordon argues that contemporary welfare programs for single mothers were shaped by the ideas and the decisions that went into state aid programs created between 1910 and 1920, programs that were variously called mothers' pensions, widows' pensions and mothers' aid. Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), the program for single mothers included in the Social Security Act of 1935 that grew into today's AFDC, merely added federal funds to the mothers' aid model. Unless we understand the fundamental problem in the mothers' aid model, we are condemned, as historians are fond of saying, to repeat our mistakes.

So what was the problem? Those professionals were at best ambivalent on the question of whether women, married or unmarried, should be full-time mothers or people with children who also work in the paid labor force and participate in public life outside the home. What they wrote into state legislation, and enacted in the administration of state programs, was "the dominant family norm, the family-wage system ... that prescribes earning as the sole responsibility of husbands and unpaid domestic labor as the only proper long-term occupation for women."

This vision of social structure undergirding public assistance programs was historically short-sighted, Gordon says, because it neglected the inconvenient fact that many women with children did and had to work in the paid labor force, and many more mothers would have to or would want to work for pay as the twentieth century wore on. The family wage model was held up as the ideal, even as reformers planned some kind of assistance to women who were not hitched to a male breadwinner. Thus, the reformers and the program designers didn't trouble themselves with reconciling childrearing and the rest of life—most especially, earning a living and being involved in community affairs.

Quite the contrary. Mothers' aid put mothers in a double bind. On the one hand, they were supposed to uphold standards of "good motherhood." As defined by the mostly prosperous, highly educated, white women reformers, good

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mothers should be home with their children, feed them white-middle class diets, maintain white-middle class standards of housekeeping and household space (such as separate sleeping quarters for children and adults), attend church, and good single mothers should remain celibate. On the other hand, these programs often expressly calculated the grants to be less than the family's needs, so that the mother would have to make up the difference with work for pay. But only certain kinds of work were considered appropriate for mothers—usually laundry, sewing, domestic service and other jobs that were extensions of women's household work. Program rules often forbade full-time, factory employment. Mothers were supposed to be home with their children, and so the programs encouraged work at home, in which women could take in other people's domestic chores and perhaps put their kids to work, too. Needless to say, these rules for proper employment kept single mothers far away from higher-paying jobs, and from situations in which they might have unionized or collectively pushed for better wages and working conditions.

The eligibility of single mothers for public assistance was predicated on their having once married and on the failure of the family wage system through no fault of their own. Between about 1900 and 1940, Gordon tells us, the vast majority—about 77 percent—of the group that we would now call single mothers were widows. The next largest group—16 percent—was made up of women whose husbands were absent. Today we would probably call them separated; in those days they were called "deserted." Only between 4 and 6 percent of the women heading households with children were women who had never married.

A woman's link to a man was thus crucial to her status as a legitimate recipient of aid in the first place. The breakdown of marriage, through death or abandonment, was the only thing that could make a single mother deserving, and even in that circumstance many reformers had doubts about who was to blame for desertion. Some restricted their programs to widows. Others argued for calling the programs widows' pensions rather than mothers' pensions, to emphasize the purity and the faultlessness of the recipients. Thus, though no woman could achieve economic self-sufficiency on the kinds of jobs mothers' aid programs permitted, pursuing that other route to economic security—linking up with a man—was also forbidden, as inconsistent with virtuous womanhood. If virtue was demonstrated by a woman's having once entered into marriage and the accompanying family wage-system, then recipients of mothers' aid would be violating the norm of marriage by taking up with another man. Mothers' aid programs, like ADC and AFDC in their wake, supervised mothers' sexual and social behavior, making remarriage, socializing or economic cooperation with a man extremely difficult, and driving much of this aspect of mothers' lives underground.

When the great move to social insurance came along in the 1930s, single mothers, and most women wage-earners, were not included. White male (and some female) wage-earners got a universal entitlement program. Eligibility rested on contributions to the insurance scheme, which in turn rested on length of time in so-called covered employment, jobs for which the employer was required to make payroll deductions and pay contributions to the scheme. Single mothers got a degrading program, one with much lower benefits and much greater supervision over their lives. Aid to Dependent Children rested on a means test and a morals test, instead of a work-and-contributions test.

Mothers had to prove that they were financially needy, while recipients of other forms of social insurance (primarily old-age pensions, but also disability pensions and unemployment insurance) did not. To qualify as needy, mothers couldn't have much at all in the way of savings or assets. Mothers also had to prove that they were morally fit by letting caseworkers review how they were raising their kids, spending their money and spending their time. As in the earlier mothers' aid programs, ADC put mothers in a double bind. Their welfare grants were not enough to live on, but if they worked to supplement their grants, they were required to report the income so that the amount of their earnings could be deducted from their grants.

Much contemporary feminist history of the welfare state assumes, in Gordon's words, that "women were slotted into inferior programs because of 'patriarchy' and men's monopoly on state power." But the evidence speaks otherwise. True, the designers of welfare programs for poor single women fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the problem; in fact, they built programs that were actually harmful to women. But here's the bombshell: the misguided program designers were not men, they were women, and primarily a group of white women activists who would be considered feminists by most of today's definitions. Their primary goal was to improve the status and the power of women.

Mothers' pensions, and then ADC, were the products of an unusually powerful coalition of women and children's advocates. The coalition included men, but it was dominated by a coterie of highly educated, articulate, politically active and financially independent women. The vision of women's welfare promoted by this group rested on a set of beliefs that Gordon calls maternalism. Most important was the belief that "domestic and family responsibilities [are] essential to the vast majority of women and to the social order." How, Gordon wonders at the outset of her book, can we explain this paradox? How can we explain that feminist reformers promoted a social policy so inimical to women's interests?

Gordon has a complex answer to these questions. The group of women who were most influential in designing ADC genuinely believed that the mothers' aid model would be better for poor women than social insurance. They actively opposed the plan of insuring workers through their employers, even though they supported the principle of universal benefits, in part because they knew it wouldn't help most poor women. The vast majority of women, who did not work outside the home, would not be covered in such a plan, and most of those who did work for pay had such low wages that they would probably be unable to afford the cost of premiums.

Instead of social insurance, the maternalist reformers wanted a program, like mothers' pensions, that recognized and rewarded the contributions of unskilled and semi-skilled women inside the home, and a program that, frankly, encouraged women to stay at home and not to enter the workforce. "Since the majority view among women reformers at this time was that mothers *ought* to stay home, they naturally opposed a welfare system that made staying home economically disadvantageous." And since a domestic role was at the core of white reformers' vision, they eschewed political alliances with trade unions and with the more labor-oriented women's organizations. Such alliances might have produced policies far more beneficial to the reality of poor women's economic lives.

If white women reformers rejected the social insurance model for principled and pragmatic reasons, they implicitly rejected another model—the black women reformers' model—out of ignorance, and perhaps out of prejudice. Although the black women reformers shared the image of breadwinner husbands and domestic wives as the family ideal, they were much more realistic than their white counterparts in their acceptance of women's employment as a

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"long-term and widespread" necessity, and many of their reform efforts centered on meeting employed mothers' needs. They emphasized education and training for women. They advocated and established daycare centers and kindergartens. They organized around women's employment issues, notably better wages and working conditions for domestics. They pushed the benevolent society model of sickness and life insurance, a model that was more inclusive of women and children because it didn't tie insurance eligibility to wage-earning. Each of these strategies, Gordon suggests, might have been a more effective way to assure the welfare of women and children, because each was based on a good understanding of the place of paid work in women's lives.

Gordon explains the paradox of how white women reformers betrayed their poorer sisters in part by suggesting that they acted on a correct assessment of the dominant alternative (social insurance), and in part by saying they were just ignorant of the alternatives offered by black reformers. For Gordon, it is merely "ironic" or "illogical" that these reformers ignored or denied the centrality of paid work in many women's lives. Yet much of the book offers a harsher criticism of the white welfare reformers as a group of women who imposed their social class and race values on women below them in the social hierarchy, and who used public welfare programs to enhance their own political and professional status, often at the expense of the women whose interests they were allegedly promoting. In the end, Gordon doesn't seem quite sure where she stands.

Her strongest claim in the harsher vein is that "welfare reformers' feminism was characterized by a class double standard." The women in the white welfare network were much less likely to be married and/or to have children than women as a whole. Only 34 percent had ever been married, and most of those were divorced, separated or widowed. Only 28 percent had children. They lived, and deliberately chose, lives that were very different from the lives they advocated for poor women. (One of Gordon's most important themes is that white women reformers differed significantly from other women with respect to marriage and fertility, but she doesn't give exactly comparable figures for the three different groups of reformers, nor does she give rates of marriage and fertility for women as a whole, or women in the same age group as her reformers. And though her argument rests on an approach she calls "collective biography," she describes it cursorily in a footnote, without divulging how she selected and bounded her "samples." Readers have to take her analyses pretty much on faith.)

At least a quarter of the white women reformers were in relationships with other women that "might have been called 'Boston marriages' a few decades before," Gordon writes. They all worked outside the home, many in salaried positions, the rest as volunteers. They were actively engaged in public affairs, and little engaged, it seems, in raising children. They talked quite explicitly about their "rejection of marriage in favor of the community." And some of them, some of the time, seemed to discriminate against mothers for the same reasons male-dominated businesses always have and still do: "they won't be free to travel," as Grace Abbot, one-time head of the Children's Bureau, said about a mother of young children who had been recommended to her for a job. When the day was over, they thought that *other* women belonged in the home; and they built a social welfare program for poor women that made sure careers in business and public life would not be open to them.

These largely Anglo-Saxon and northern European women were troubled by the social mores of newer immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, and in large measure they conceived of welfare programs as schools for moral and

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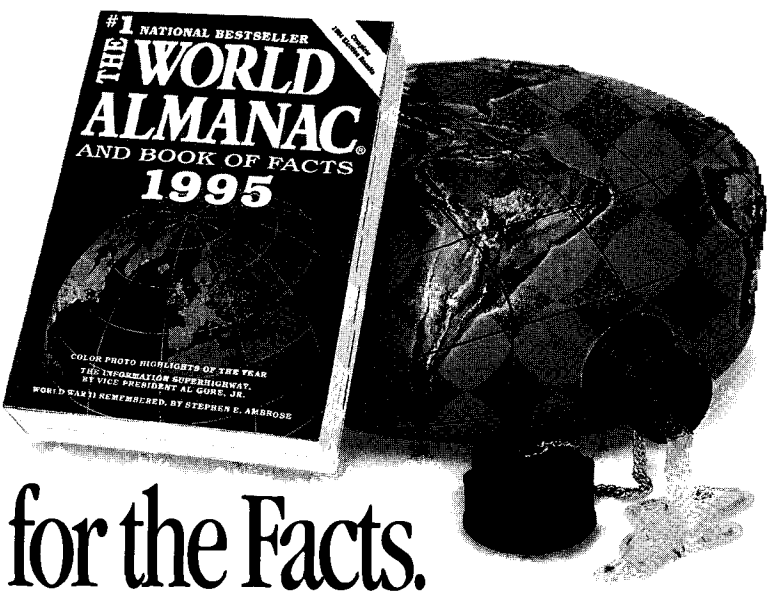
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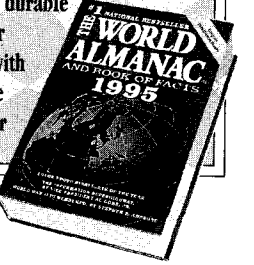

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spiritual education of newcomers, as well as training in the proper American standards of housekeeping and childrearing. Some of the most interesting material in Gordon's book concerns the way this civilizing mission was translated into the profession of social casework, and how that profession in turn was the major vehicle for transporting white upper-class and middle-class women from the genteel domain of the domestic parlor to the public sphere of professional employment and public office.

Though the reformers sincerely believed that poor women needed their services, Gordon also sees strong elements of professional and class self-interest at work. All but the oldest women in the network had "personally experienced the transformation of social work from a volunteer to professional activity, beginning their careers as volunteers for charity or reform groups, ending as salaried workers for the same or similar groups. . . ." "Moreover," she notes several pages later, "those who identified as social workers were continually anxious about their status as professionals." Their careers were directly tied to their charity and their activism.

A good deal of the white women reformers' rejection of social insurance, it seems, was motivated by their realization that a rights-based entitlement program had no place for social workers on its payroll. A system of contributory insurance didn't need professionally trained caseworkers to investigate eligibility of claimants, assess a variety of needs and provide education and services to help people. It needed data clerks and check writers.

Poor women got a means-tested and morals-tested welfare program, Gordon says, because the social insurance advocates wouldn't tolerate such features in a program that they conceived as entitlement-based, generous and respectful of individual autonomy. The women's reform advocates insisted on a program whose core was moral supervision of its clients. The purpose of old-age pensions, wrote one of these women, should be "not merely the comfort . . . of the individual . . . but the influence on the moral fibre of the community."

Gordon seems uncomfortable with the parts of her own analysis that fault the white women reformers, and so she does some fancy footwork to redeem them. ADC was a significant historical accomplishment, she insists, because it established the principle of public responsibility for poor single women, sought to remove the stigma of pauperism, got single mothers recognized as a deserving group, and ultimately enhanced the power of all women because "it helped create the possibility of women's independence." Still, most of the book testifies to failures on each of these counts, or at best ambiguous results. Since Gordon's research is about reformers' ideas and activities, not about the operation and the accomplishments of welfare programs, her conclusions about the impact of the programs are largely in the realm of unsupported assertions anyway, but this eleventh-hour attempt to resurrect the heroism of the white reformers detracts mightily from the coherence of the book.

Gordon thinks that the history of welfare programs for women offers "particularly sharp" lessons for contemporary policy debates about welfare, and here she relies mostly on her harsh version of history. Like many recent writers on the left, Gordon thinks that would-be welfare reformers must attend not only to the fiscal and social consequences of welfare programs, but also to their political consequences. The biggest mistake of the white women reformers in the 1930s was to create entirely different programs for poor mothers and male workers: by stratifying the constituencies of social programs, they also fragmented the constituencies for the welfare state. Gordon calls for universal programs, because only they will command the broad political backing necessary to maintain decent financial support and social acceptance of single mothers.

Beyond the advantages of universal entitlements, the concrete lessons that Gordon draws from history are sketchy at best. Politicians should take every occasion to highlight and label all Social Security programs, mortgage deductions, schools, parks, municipal garbage collection and other government benefits for the middle class as the "welfare benefits" that they are, so as to empty the term "welfare" of the stigma it now carries. And most important, welfare reformers should repudiate maternalism once and for all. Welfare for single mothers must support women in both work and childrearing, with a combination of decent wages, additional income supports, more family-friendly workplaces and policies that encourage men to do more of the domestic labor.

Between the lines, in that harsher assessment of earlier reformers that Gordon wants to downplay, one senses still another lesson: we should be wary of welfare reforms that are more likely to create good jobs for middle-class professionals than good jobs for poor women. As Gordon notes early in her book, "the vision of mothers' aid that predominated in the United States ultimately created a more extensive charitable sector rather than a welfare state." One has to wonder whether the put-'em-to-work vision of welfare reform that has predominated since the mid-1970s is doing the same thing, this time creating a more extensive not-for-profit and for-profit service sector comprised of job training firms and programs, job counselors, consultants and program evaluators. This is a lesson that conservative critics of big government and big bureaucracy will be only too happy to draw.

In drawing lessons, Gordon doesn't mention the most striking similarity between the climate of welfare reform in the early part of the century and now, namely, the anxiety of a white and nativist "us" about a non-white and immigrant "them." In both periods, that nativist anxiety has been not only about table manners, clothing and diets, but about racial and ethnic mixing, "pollution" of the white race, and eventual numerical predominance of new immigrants in politics, in part because of higher birth rates among non-whites than among whites. Today's welfare discussion is intensified by the perception that a substantial portion of mothers lack the beneficial influences not only of white middle-class neighbors and norms, but also of men of any description.

If we heed Gordon's strong version of history, we should see that this is precisely the anxiety that leads to a welfare policy designed more to provide moral uplift than economic security, more to discourage high rates of fertility among the poor than to provide high standards of living for poor children. Thus, we have proposals to educate teens in sexual abstinence, to discourage out-of-wedlock births by eliminating additional payments for illegitimate children conceived while their mother is on AFDC, and to put such children under more beneficial influences by placing them in adoptive families, supervised group homes or orphanages. The big difference is that now it is conservatives pushing this agenda of moral uplift and population control, rather than liberal social reform advocates (though the Democrats are themselves doing some fancy footwork to preserve their liberal principles and still capture some of the popular support for the conservative program). And it is no coincidence that some versions of the conservative welfare reform agenda would finance these initiatives largely by removing all funding from social service programs for *legal* immigrants.

Another lesson that one might draw from Gordon's history is that when moral uplift and improving the nation's population "stock" replace fighting pov-

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erty as the goal of welfare policy, programs based on moral supervision are the likely result. For all the Republican wailing against the wasteful bureaucracy of the Democratic welfare state, the Republican welfare reform proposals would create bureaucracies of their own. Having eliminated abortion as a possibility for poor women, conservatives are left with advocating highly labor-intensive programs to discourage pregnancy. Imagine the amount of abstinence education it might take to affect fertility rates in the absence of birth control and abortion. You could have a pretty big jobs program for moral supervisors. In fact, the conservative welfare reform platform pretends that a little bit of cheap jaw-boning ("just say no") will do the trick, so as not to have to fund (and to advocate) much sex education. Then, as if to acknowledge that "just say no" won't work, conservatives put the real resources into providing supervision for the unintended or intended kids that poor, young, unmarried women do have.

Just as the social reformers of the early part of the century were unwilling to face the inadequacy of the family wage model for the social structure of their time, contemporary welfare reformers are by and large unwilling to face up to the inadequacy of the American economy. A substantial portion of jobs simply don't pay enough on which to live, much less on which to support children. The corporate safety net, in which private employers provided long-term job stability, pension and medical benefits, and coverage of dependent family members, is quickly eroding. The painful truth is that the welfare state is itself now the most important source of new jobs in the American economy, whether through direct public employment in local, state and federal governments, or indirect employment in private and non-profit contractors to the welfare state. The welfare state is no longer just a small remedial add-on to a productive economy that employs and feeds most of the population. Linda Gordon's welfare reformers made room for themselves politically and economically by building welfare programs that employed them. The dilemma facing welfare reformers now is how to make room for a new set of politically and economically disenfranchised people when we can no longer count on a robust private economy to support its own workers and to foot the bill for the welfare state.

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The unexpected voyages of Patrick O'Brian.

Napoleonic Complex

BY JAMES HAMILTON-PATERSON

Here we have that not unfamiliar figure: the first-rate writer who has worked consistently and prolifically for almost the past half-century, whose books have been greatly praised by famous people while remaining unknown to a wide audience, but whose time—at last—has come. No one whose time has not come is treated to his own bibliography fleshed out with admiring essays. And when the essayists are people as varied and distinguished as a British ex-minister for science, a Fellow of the National Maritime Museum, a professor of psychiatry at UCLA, an ex-professor of English literature at Oxford and Charlton Heston, you know you're dealing with someone special.

But what kind of writer merits this ambiguous kind of attention? Among the answers would be: a private and retiring soul who lives on the borders of Catalonia and has little truck with literary society; someone whose erudition is so deep and wide that he can be written off as "just a scholar"; a writer whose great achievement is a seventeen-volume masterpiece of fiction who can yet be dismissed as "just a historical novelist." Concerning the latter category, Patrick O'Brian himself has this to say:

> The historical novel, as I learnt with some concern after I had written two or three, belongs to a despised genre. But the tale or narrative set in the past may have its particular, time-free value; and the candid reader will not misunderstand me, will not suppose that I intend any preposterous comparison, when I observe that Homer was farther removed in time from Troy than I am from the Napoleonic wars; yet he spoke to the Greeks for two thousand years and more.

This large but proper claim, modestly

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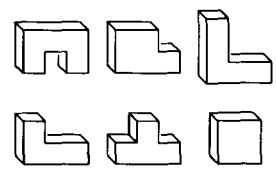

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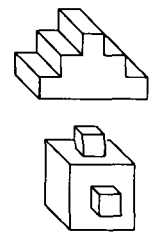

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made, concerns what he calls his "naval tales." These are the seventeen novels set between, roughly, 1802 and 1812: from the Treaty of Amiens until Bonaparte's defeat was inevitable. All of them are hinged on the central friendship of Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin. The one is a Royal Navy officer, the other is a half-Irish, half-Catalan doctor, scientist and spy. Theirs is a most striking friendship, of far greater depth and interest than the friendship of, say, Holmes and Watson or (as Charlton Heston reminds us) Huck Finn and Nigger Jim. I shall return to them later, being first inclined to wonder about this irritating question of genre, since O'Brian himself recognizes it as closely bound up with his curious literary status, with his champions' defiance and with how he might be assessed over the next 2,000 years.

It is as pertinent to ask why certain writers set their books in the past as it is to wonder why others choose the future. Superficially, the historical novel has much in common with science fiction. Both genres undeniably attract indifferent writers who tend to concentrate on special effects and temporally local color. The setting, whether far in a no-future or in a bodice-ripping no-past, can function for lazy or inept writers as a way of dispensing with the difficult business of plausibility: the tedious diurnal realisms, authenticities of character, internal consistency and other components of likelihood itself. The hardest thing of all is to convey difference of thought, which is why most historical and science fiction novels are stocked with contemporary dummies in fancy dress.

Despite exceptions that prove the rule—*War and Peace*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Jack Vance's anthropologically observed worlds of the Oikumene and the Rigel Concourse—serious literary opinion is that these are lightweight genres. (Indeed, the category of genre implies that only literary fiction is not one.) For reasons of cultural fashion and the economics of book-buying, genres have proliferated to the point where fiction's endless subdivision has come to seem like a publisher's and bookseller's gimmick, dealing in shorthands that might be hoped to appeal to an unconfident but politicized reading public conscious of its alliances and special interests. ("In the classic tradition of *Watership Down* . . .") But what is Gay Fiction? Women's Fiction? Historical Fiction? Are they more than publishers' fictions? Literary Fiction is itself subdivided (the Campus Novel, the Road Novel, even the Great American Novel), and it certainly has no monopoly on imagination or seriousness. In the end, readers—and reviewers—can do little but take their stand with Oscar Wilde: "Books are well written or badly written. That is all."

But it isn't quite all. Connoisseurs of well-written books have certain sophisticated expectations about things such as plot and character, inherited from a long tradition of what might constitute a complete and satisfying aesthetic experience. Plenty of novels are perfectly well written but remain in some essential degree null. Nor is this merely a matter of the reader's not being sufficiently engaged. Many thrillers are more or less gripping for as long as they last, but they lack all ability to echo in the mind after the final page has been turned. They blur into each other as indistinguishable inhabitants of the genre. And what of the "special interest" novel that caters, or panders, to a particular readership whose critical faculties are thought to be disarmed simply because the story is all about homosexuals or horses or set in a hospital? What are we to say about John Le Carré, who writes about spies, but whose collected works could be viewed as an extended meditation on the entirely literary topic of loyalty and betrayal?

The Rendezvous and Other Stories
by Patrick O'Brian
(W.W. Norton, 250 pp., $22)

The Commodore
by Patrick O'Brian
(HarperCollins, 281 pp., £14.99)

Patrick O'Brian: Critical Essays and a Bibliography
edited by A.E. Cunningham
(W.W. Norton, 175 pp., $23.95)

Patrick O'Brian's *chef d'oeuvre* obliges us to consider such things. It falls into the genre of historical fiction, the navy-at-war subdivision: precisely the milieu that C.S. Forester's Hornblower novels so successfully made their own. Great claims are now being made on O'Brian's behalf for literary qualities that nobody ever tried seriously to attribute to Forester. O'Brian's saga is said to be more gripping because it is more sophisticated, more historically accurate in the broadly cultural sense, more worthy of being thought to escape the "adventure" classification and to spill safely over into the great central category of serious literature.

To return to the author's central dyad, Captain Jack Aubrey and Dr. Stephen Maturin: in all fairness I must admit to having read only two of the books in the series—the third, *HMS Surprise* which appeared in 1973, and the latest (*The Commodore*), but can confirm that Aubrey and Maturin are both vastly more interesting fellows than poor old Hornblower. On the evidence of O'Brian's own (and only) biographical sketch in *Critical Essays*—a masterpiece of distance and restraint—their creator grew up in Ireland and England, periodically sickly and urged by doctors to take fresh air when he could. He took up crewing and sailing; the sea was his "compensation," as he calls it.

Captain Jack Aubrey is a sailor before he is a man of action. Time and again we feel his love of the sea, and especially his love of his ships, as being enabling and restorative. It is the details that are unmistakable: not so much those of rigging, which any fool might learn, but the ravishment of being afloat, of sitting in the crosstrees 100 feet above deck describing huge trajectories through the air with the ship's rolls and plunges. Aubrey is constantly aware of the feel of his ship underfoot, her handling dependent on dozens of variables: the rake of her masts, the disposition of shot and stores below, the amount of weed on the hull after three months in tropical waters. He pays the raptest attention to her sounds and her smells. In this context, Jack Aubrey is a man in love. Only secondarily is he an eighteenth-century man of action, bluff, gallant, humane.

His friend Stephen Maturin is no sailor, and even after years of voyaging still falls over things and refers to the "floor." His love of the sea comes from a different angle than that of a mariner. He is a naturalist and a scientist of the post-Linnaean era, intent on collecting and classifying rocks, creatures and plants whenever he can get ashore. Aboard, he acts as ship's surgeon. He is a speculative man, a scholar with a flair for languages. (His Irish and Catalan background is perhaps not unlike his author's, and we remember that O'Brian has also worked for years as a translator, converting Simone de Beauvoir into English, as well as Henri Charrière's *Papillon*.)

Maturin is far more secretive than his friend Aubrey, who is capable of subterfuge as part of the tactics of battle but who is not essentially a devious man. Maturin, a Catholic, has a real cross-cultural complexity and diverse loyalties. His family connections in Spain and the southern Mediterranean, as well as his languages, are exploited by the British government, whose network of agents supplies the intelligence necessary for Nelson's navy to keep a step ahead of Bonaparte. (In his sketch in the *Critical Essays*, O'Brian hints delicately at his own wartime activities in, presumably, the French Resistance.)

These two unusual friends play Corelli and Boccherini duets together for relaxation in the captain's cabin. Yet theirs is

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not by any means the sexless idyll of boys' adventure stories. Both men are getting a little long in the tooth and have loves and marriage plans of their own. These are conducted with an Austen-like propriety ashore in England, very much against the clock, since Jack Aubrey's life as a naval officer makes him prey to sudden postings, quite apart from the exigencies of tides and weather. Mostly, the friends' emotional relationships are carried on by letters that take months to arrive, generally out of sequence.

They are not, to be sure, conventionally handsome men. There are constant references to Aubrey's scars, as well as to his becoming fat, while Maturin is "not at all agreeable to look at and from the physical point of view he had never been much of a lover—a state of affairs much influenced by years of addiction to opium...." Hardly late-twentieth-century heroes. It is one of a number of hints that beneath his dazzling bunting of ships, ports, battles, diction and speculation, O'Brian is displaying a literary technique so accomplished that he can allow it to border on the satirical: a skill that at once exempts him from the category of "genre novelist."

O'Brian's narratives are astonishing in that they break all the rules—certainly those of the adventure novel. His is not a technique that relies on the usual tricks for building tension. In its calmly meandering way, the plot of *HMS Surprise* is a good example; and yet it still fulfills the classic publisher's claim of being "unputdownable." It opens with the Admiralty decision that a vast sum in prize money owed Captain Aubrey from a previous adventure should be ruled as "droits of the Crown." This was the nest egg the Captain had been banking on to enable him to marry Sophie, so he must now put to sea again as soon as possible in a fresh search for fortune. Meanwhile, he learns that his friend Stephen Maturin has been captured on Minorca by French agents and is being tortured. Aubrey rescues him in a daring night raid, but rack and thumbscrew have left the Doctor in a pitiful state.

The main narrative concerns the voyage that occupies the rest of the book. Aubrey's job is simply to ferry the new British envoy out to the court of the Sultan of Kampong. Storms, becalmings, shortages of food and water, enforced stopovers in India: the difficulties unfold with a nice plausibility, ending with the most plausible occurrence of all when the envoy dies of fever before he can even set foot in Kampong. An exciting *engagement with some French warships* in the Indian Ocean eventually provides Aubrey with his prize money, hence indi-

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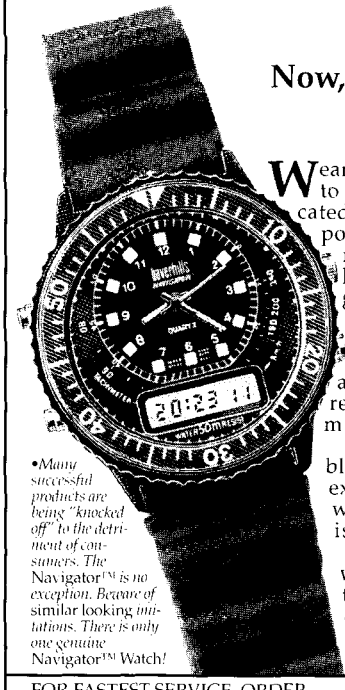

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rectly with a wife. Maturin, meanwhile, has convalesced but his own amatory future looks bleak after an intense interlude in India with an old flame who ditches him for a rich American.

This bald synopsis does no justice to the naturalness of O'Brian's narrative, but reducing things to such a chronicle of picaresque events at least shows he does not rely on ruthless plotting. There are none of those vicious symmetries beloved by adventure writers who craft their plots first and then spend 300 pages trying and failing to bring them to life. Boiled down, *HMS Surprise* may sound over-full of incident. Yet each episode follows the other with perfect reasonableness. One never for a moment doubts a character's motivation and there are enough loose ends to be consistent with life as we know it.

Loose ends are, indeed, a hallmark of O'Brian's originality, which often deals cavalierly with usual expectations of adventure narratives. Climaxes are sometimes deliberately sidetracked or frittered away, yet without seeming anticlimactic. Crucial letters arrive after months of waiting and apprehension: we are not told what is in them, but only later are allowed a description of Maturin's pallor or his inability to sleep. An officer with whom we have some acquaintance dies, but we only discover it from a tiny laconic reference to "Bowes' burial."

O'Brian's vocabulary is properly nautical as well as impeccably of its period (don't bother hoping to catch him out in an anachronism by wondering whether the British navy would have used the word "squeegee" in 1804) and in this matter he makes no concessions. As the nautically challenged Maturin himself observes, "they speak in tropes, at sea." We are obliged to intuit the meanings of unfamiliar words or to look them up; there are few explanations and no glossaries. This is wholly admirable, and it has a remarkable effect. The reader, required for once to be a bit intelligent, responds by becoming more deeply involved in precisely the way publishers' wisdom says can never happen. Far from putting us off, the sense of being in a not entirely comprehensible world eggs us on with its strangeness. This, at last, is the quality we are always looking for in imaginative writing: the sense of being vestigially foreign in a world where we nevertheless feel quite at home.

In case we are in any doubt that there is a subtle and humorous mind at work, a mind that understands all about the solemn expectations of "literary fiction," O'Brian slips in the occasional touch of parody. In *The Commodore* we encounter a West African Krooman named John Square who speaks a "singularly precise English," while telling a fascinated Stephen Maturin about a Dutch naturalist who had done some pioneering work on snakes. "Serpents alone, was it?" asks the Doctor eagerly:

> "Oh no, no. Deary me, no. Elephants and shrew-mice, bats, birds, giant scorpions too: but serpents first, and when I showed him Kroo python, three fathoms long, coiled around her eggs, he gave me seven shillings, he was so pleased—seven shillings and a bright red wool hat."
>
> "I hope he wrote a book. Oh how I hope he wrote a book. Square, will you tell me his name now, the worthy gentleman?"
>
> "Mr. Klopstock, sir," said Square, shaking his head. "No book."
>
> "No book at all?"
>
> Square shook his head again. "Mr. Klopstock, he dead."

As undaunted by the long shadow of Conrad as he is by the shades of Forester and Marryat, O'Brian is a good enough writer to be confident of his difference, even to revel in it.

That Aubrey and Maturin present a durable relationship based on deep, even ill-assorted, congruities at once puts them into a serious class of fictional heroes. But it is in conveying the sense of a different era that O'Brian's achievement is most marked. We take for granted that his details of dress, inn prices, coach travel and the rest are as accurate as his ships' furniture and naval custom. But not only do his characters express themselves in rhythms and cadences no longer to be heard ("Which I only passed the remark," said Wilks), they also think like people of another time. We learn in passing of the hanging of a child on a gibbet—for theft, presumably—but the topic, like the child, is left to hang as being impertinent to the story. There is no twentieth-century outrage or exegesis. Maturin pours jocular scorn on his friend Jack's marriage prospects, soon veering off into a soliloquy which reminds us that it is only some ten years since Malthus's first book was published:

> Generation after generation, and no increase in beauty; none in intelligence. On the analogy of dogs, or even of horses, the rich should stand nine foot high and the poor run about under the table. This does not occur: yet the absence of improvement never stops men desiring the company of beautiful women.

When he muses on the qualities demanded of a good naval officer, Maturin faithfully reflects an Enlightenment background tempered by the new notions of psychology (the word dates, surprisingly, from a century earlier):

> Authority is a solvent of humanity: look at any husband, any father of a family, and note the absorption of the person by the persona, the individual by the role. Then multiply the family, and the authority, by some hundreds and see the effect upon a sea-captain, to say nothing of an absolute monarch. Surely man in general is born to be oppressed or solitary, if he is to be fully human.

This is a wonderfully un-twentieth-century conclusion, a ponderable observation that bears out O'Brian's claim that a narrative set in the past "may have its particular, time-free value." Yet this passage also has relevance for the entire series of novels. The first decade of the 1800s turned out to be crucial for the British Navy, partly because such issues as the meaning of authority were in the air. The intellectual cement of the eighteenth century was coming apart under the weight of republicanism, science and the expediencies of state control in time of war. The old individualism whereby a captain could more or less choose or press his own officers and crews, who then felt personal loyalty in proportion to his worth (which included any prize money his tactical skill enabled the ship to win and share out), was being replaced by the gradual centralization of authority in the Admiralty. Officers and crews were now being shifted around ships in bureaucratic fashion.

There had begun to be a foreshadowing of the Victorians' dread low-church abstractions. The sense of loyalty to an individual was giving way to notions of Duty (as expressed by Nelson); duty to the ship was soon to elide into duty to the Ship of State. Centralized control meant more regulations, especially those concerning punishment and the crews' welfare. Captain Aubrey himself makes several pungent comments about those old-style naval captains known as "hard horses": martinets and floggers whose ships seldom fought the better for their brutal and whimsical discipline. It is at this significant cusp in naval and social history that the author sets his Aubrey-Maturin novels.

Any writer might feel benignly envious of O'Brian for having found, and distinctively claimed, a piece of imaginative territory so privately fertile. Nothing in the selection of his ten short stories in *The Rendezvous* (except "Billabillian," a historical maritime piece that reads more like a chapter than a self-contained story) gives much hint of the place or period on which he was destined to alight and claim as home. On the other hand, one could guess that landscape of sorts would play a decisive role. Twenty out of the twenty-seven stories have exterior settings with a direct bearing on

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events, or concern the active intervention of nature in human lives. It is certainly evidence of a profound love and knowledge of the natural world, surely deriving from a childhood familiar with fishing and shooting and rambling and hunting.

"Wolfsberg," for example, tells how someone in extreme distress retains a grip on herself by enumerating the botanical and zoological details of the lonely landscape in which she wanders. Suddenly amnesiac under the stress of emotional pain, she finds she can remember neither her name nor where she is. Gradually, she reclaims information by relying on that part of her memory which is unaffected. She rehearses the Latin names of the cranial nerves of the dogfish and, on hearing the croak of a midwife toad, identifies it faultlessly as *Alytes obstetricans* (a misprint—*Ayltes*—at this of all junctures is miserably inopportune).

This is a distinguished collection, interesting for the light it throws on O'Brian's magnum opus. It, two biographies (Joseph Banks, Picasso), poetry, some early novels and the mass of translations remind us that he is not "just" a historical novelist but a literary figure of the utmost range and competence. The *Critical Essays and Bibliography* lists the output of a working life, while the assorted experts admiringly vouch for O'Brian's accuracy and scholarship in their various fields. The volume is more than a concordance for the avid fan: it is a token of the affection that his writing inspires. This affection clearly derives from the writer's own unmistakable love for what he is doing. That he feels entirely at ease in his created world is proved by his productivity. From internal (and photographic) evidence, O'Brian can't be far short of eighty; yet he has produced a solid Aubrey-Maturin novel practically every year for the past twenty, as well as the two biographies. On stylistic evidence, moreover, he has grown neither weary nor jaded. *The Commodore* is still full of the energy that comes from a writer having struck a vein.

But.... Somewhere there's a but. When books so amply fulfill Wilde's requirement of being well written, it seems churlish and absurd to wonder whether they aren't a little too readable. Patrick O'Brian's marine description is indeed ravishing; his battles are nail-bitingly tense; the operation that Maturin performs on himself to remove a bullet lodged near his heart is harrowing to a degree. It is a brilliantly imagined world that one scarcely wishes ever to leave. And yet.... In "The Creations of Sound," Wallace Stevens says of someone's (I believe Eliot's) poems: "They do not make the visible a little hard/ To see..." O'Brian's saga is perhaps unchallenging for similar reasons.

This is not to say that it doesn't provoke speculation. But the speculations tend to be comforting, broad, easy. They concern changes in language, changes in social attitudes (toward death, punishment, women, children, pain). Any of these is weighty enough, but in the context of such readable, racy narrative they provoke a rather *sub specie aeternitatis* response in the reader. "Well, well," we say. "So it goes on. The human mind doesn't really change much after all. Underneath all the...," and we fill in the rest with some pipe-puffing homespun.

In any case, O'Brian now looks justly set for popular as well as literary acclaim, and I rejoice for him as for all those who have yet to discover him. If we wonder, in the end, whether the Aubrey-Maturin saga isn't something of a soap, we also find ourselves asking what else Homer is. What is *The Iliad*, if not one of the grandest soaps of all time? Despite his own self-deprecations, Patrick O'Brian is unquestionably the Homer of the Napoleonic wars.

JAMES HAMILTON-PATERSON is the author most recently of *Ghosts of Manila* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

Unmodern Masters

BY EDWARD L. AYERS

The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism by Eugene Genovese

(Harvard University Press, 138 pp., $22.50)

Eugene Genovese has always made a point of cutting against the grain. He was a Marxist during the heyday of anti-communism, an advocate of black studies when such innovations were dismissed as a travesty of higher education, an outspoken defender of William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* when it was attacked by black intellectuals, a member of the Old Left when the New Left was in its ascendancy. Genovese's new book, based on a series of lectures that he gave at Harvard last year, carries on his tradition of contrarianism.

Genovese's feisty independence began early in his career. When an influential professor at Brooklyn College told him, on the strength of one senior honors paper about the Old South, that the young man would make southern slaveholders the object of his life's work, Genovese thought the professor "had lost his mind. I demurred politely but thought: sure, a working-class Sicilian-American from Brooklyn, who has never so much as seen a mule or a cotton field, is chomping at the bit to spend his life in a study of the chivalry and a bunch of rednecks." But that is exactly what he has done.

In a series of iconoclastic books over the past thirty years, Genovese has recast the way historians think of the antebellum South. He has made southern history into a drama of world importance, showing how the slave South, stranded in a hostile world of liberal capitalism, fought for its life and its ideals. Genovese has always expressed respect for the consistency of the slaveholders, the thoroughness of their willful archaism. He has never defended slavery, of course; but he has defended the sincerity of the slaveholders' view of the world, chiding liberal historians who presumed that the masters must have been torn by guilt.

In *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, his masterpiece of 1974, and the best book ever written about American slavery, Genovese showed how slaves, too, shaped this world, how slaves forced slaveholders to reckon with the humanity of slaves. That book had all the Genovese hallmarks: a sophisticated engagement with Marxist theory (in this case, the notion of "hegemony" developed by Gramsci), a passionate engagement with the sources (in this case, the oral histories of slavery produced by the Works Progress Administration during the 1930s) and a willingness to take Southerners of both races at their word. For Genovese, that word was "paternalism." Slaves and slaveholders claimed that they cared about one another, even loved one another. Rather than dismissing such language, Genovese showed how it was that people in a slave society could say such things about one another, how they could even think of themselves as members of the same "family." He showed that it served the interests of both slave and slaveholder to live within such a fiction,

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that the illusion of family gave the slaves leverage and gave the slaveholders a rationale for a kind of power whose validity was being challenged by the outside world. The book is rich and complex, troubling and triumphant.

Genovese, in collaboration with his wife and fellow historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, has long been working on a new book, a history as ambitious as *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, a history of the slaveholders and their ideology. Over the years, the two historians, sometimes separately and sometimes together, have published glimpses of the larger project. From those glimpses, it seems that their empathy for the slaveholders is growing. The longer Genovese knows the masters of the Old South, it appears, the more he admires them. He appreciates especially the slaveholders' insistence on the inevitability of social hierarchy and constraint: both the historian and his subjects agree that these are necessary ingredients of the social good.

It is this belief that lies at the heart of Genovese's work these days, this belief that he must defend to a skeptical audience. Genovese has long raged with disgust and fury at the state of contemporary life. The world is plunging "into moral decadence and moral decline," he writes in his new book, adopting the language of the thinkers he champions; it is filled with "moral idiocy" and "barbarism." Genovese sees irresponsible and selfish fantasies of "freedom" as the universal threat of the late twentieth century. "An ignoble dream of personal liberation," he writes, "whether in its radical-democratic, communist, or free-market form, has proven the most dangerous illusion of our time." This dream of liberation is so dangerous because "the hopeless quest for an equality of condition among all people has generated ever more insidious manipulation of society by elites that pretend to be other than privileged groups." Genovese, disillusioned by the course of American liberalism as well as by the collapse of the Soviet Union, apparently sees little hope in self-consciously modern systems of values. Only returning to the restraint and control of the past will do.

Genovese has turned to southern conservatism to see whether it might offer the path for this return. He argues that southern conservatism constitutes "America's most impressive native-born critique of our national development, of liberalism, and of the more disquieting features of the modern world." Southern conservatism offers, he believes, a usable past, hard-won knowledge that might help to build a more humane society. He admires southern conservatism for its opposition to "finance capitalism and, more broadly, to the attempt to substitute the market for society itself." He admires southern conservatism's opposition to "the radical individualism that is today sweeping America" and its "adherence to a Christian individualism that condemns personal license and demands submission to a moral consensus rooted in elementary piety." He admires the conservative tradition's resistance to "cosmopolitanism" and its "insistence that every people must develop its own genius."

Such views are unusual, especially in the academy. By and large, the only white Southerners who receive much respect today among intellectuals are those who fought against the Southern system: Unionists, Populists, union members, integrationists. Genovese has never shown much interest in these proto-liberals. He is more interested in those who defended the South most thoughtfully and tenaciously, who made no apologies to an outside world that seemed determined to give itself over to every ill-conceived effort to reform human nature. Genovese's unflinching insistence that we take the South's apologists seriously bewilders some readers and angers others, which is just what he intends.

Throughout his career Genovese has resurrected southern thinkers from contempt and condescension. He insisted that U. B. Phillips, the pioneering historian of slavery who was pushed aside in the great liberal rethinking of that institution during the 1950s and 1960s, still had important things to teach us; and later he championed George Fitzhugh, the most consistently reactionary and original defender of slavery, as well as the pro-slavery theologian James Henley Thornwell. *The Southern Tradition* extends the search back to John Randolph of Roanoke, John Taylor of Caroline and John C. Calhoun, skips a couple of generations in the postwar South, picks up the tradition again in the 1920s and 1930s with the authors of *I'll Take My Stand*, and concludes with Richard M. Weaver and M. E. Bradford. Genovese's new book is both a gloss and a defense of this tradition, an attempt to reclaim its perspective. Exactly what he would have us do with such a refurbished conservatism is never made clear.

The advocates of the conservative tradition have long used a self-consciously idealized South to think about America as a whole. They have not defended the actual South as much as they have defended its possibilities. Painfully aware of the South's poverty and material backwardness, these intellectuals have sought to turn disadvantages into advantages, portraying the absence of modern institutions and modern ideas as the presence of something more precious. They have envisioned the South as the heir of the Western traditions of faith, humility and respect for accumulated wisdom. In their eyes, the rest of the country has discarded such knowledge in favor of utopian dreams, a soulless worship of science, and a faith in progress that is as shallow as it is dangerous. As evidence of the truth of their vision, they have pointed in turn to the miseries of Yankee factories and cities, to the supposed delusions of abolitionists and other reformers, to the horrors of Hitler and Stalin. The conservatives tend to dwell on the illness of modernity, whether capitalist or socialist. They have sometimes been defensive, but more often they have been on the attack. In their view, it is not so much the South that needs defending as the modern world.

By and large, the self-conscious creators of the Southern tradition have said less about slavery and race than they have about religion, respect for the past, and the virtues of a rural way of life. And they have said less about the particulars of the white South's adherence to these virtues than they have about the failure of the rest of the modern world to value those virtues at all. They have used the South more as a metaphor than as an actual model. They have tended toward tracts and essays, not full-fledged histories of the South and its complexities.

In this book, for the first time in his career, Genovese deals directly with the quarrel between the white southern traditionalists and the contemporary world. *The Southern Tradition*, unlike his earlier work, is not about the Old South, nor does it use older conservative thought

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merely to call our own assumptions into question. This book is about now, about us. Genovese emphasizes, as did T. S. Eliot and Allen Tate, that a tradition is not merely inherited but seized, worked on, claimed. But can a tradition so identified with slavery be salvaged, even by people of the greatest good will? Can a tradition that defined itself from the beginning as defiance of majority will ever be anything other than defensive and reactionary?

This book seems to argue with itself, baldly asserting the necessity of the white conservative tradition only to follow with second thoughts, qualifications and reservations. Genovese uses all the forms of rhetoric for which he is famous, ranging from anguished humanism and self-deprecating humor to sly put-down and frontal assault. He is alternately aggressive and entreating, sometimes in the same paragraph. It appears that Genovese himself does not believe in the tradition wholeheartedly, though he wants to. He admits that he has been burned before; predictions about what might happen in American politics, he sardonically notes in his introduction, "are not the strong point of a man who until only a few years ago thought that socialism was the wave of the future and never dreamed that the Soviet Union would collapse."

Liberals have long conducted their own search for a tradition. Indeed, much of the nation's historiography is an implicit history of progressive liberalism, of reform movements successful and aborted, of the growth of freedom and its persistent enemies. Conservatives have sought to create usable pasts as well, but little of their history gets read beyond their own circles, and even less of it gets assigned in the nation's classrooms. Just as Genovese was the first American historian who forced his colleagues to reckon with sophisticated Marxism, so now he may be the first to force them to take sophisticated conservatism seriously. Just as Genovese helped give the South a noteworthy place in the broadest currents of world history, so, too, he now may help persuade his colleagues that there was something worth heeding in the region's most conservative thought.

His work is cut out for him. It would be hard to imagine a worldview less congenial to most liberal intellectuals than the worldview of white southern conservatism. In retrospect, Marxism was an easier sell. Although Marxism and southern conservatism share an attractive appeal in their celebration of what Genovese calls "organic social relations," connections not reducible to the marketplace and mass culture, southern conservatism's celebration of transcendence, mystery and social stratification are a far cry from Karl Marx. Marxism had an international cachet and a progressive cast going for it in academic circles, but southern conservatism seems to many Americans the very embodiment of parochialism and romantic constriction. Marxism rejects tradition as the expression of an oppressive past; southern conservatism defines itself by tradition. Marxism is aggressively secular; southern conservatism is deeply religious.

As the subtitle of his book suggests, Genovese acknowledges the "limitations" of southern conservatism. To most liberals, those limitations are so great as to be debilitating, including, as they do a tradition of defending the indefensible. Genovese does not ignore those liabilities, of course; but he argues that it is worth looking past them to the humane ideas that he believes lie underneath. Even the more secular political progressives who grant Genovese this premise may shake their heads at the Christian religiosity that constitutes a key component of southern conservatism. And even those who accept the religious underpinnings may worry about the vague necessity of "hierarchy" that Genovese invokes at critical junctures of his plea.

Genovese never tells us what he means by hierarchy. It apparently has something to do with responsibility, restraint and respect. Genovese's greatest concern seems not so much political economy as the texture of modern life. There seems to be too much licentiousness and moral experimentation for him, too much self-indulgence and contempt for authority, too much getting and spending. Genovese turns to southern conservatives who have long expressed such distaste, but Genovese's attempt to define and to defend a tradition that cuts across a century and a half may backfire. He implicates later conservatives—who sought to use the rural, religious and stratified South as an antidote to a horrific industrial and totalitarian twentieth century—with earlier conservatives who defended slavery for its own sake. To be sure, all white Southern conservatives have championed inequality; but there is a difference between an 1820s pro-slavery argument and a 1960s antistatist argument. Too much of an insistence on a single tradition may undermine the support that a newer conservatism might win on its own terms.

It is not clear, moreover, how Genovese's insistence on "the" southern tradition advances the virtues he espouses, or how the tradition may help the South in any meaningful way. He warns against "an increasingly successful campaign by the media and an academic elite to strip young white southerners, and arguably

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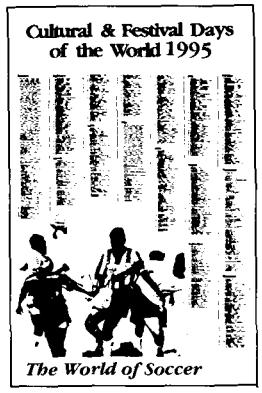

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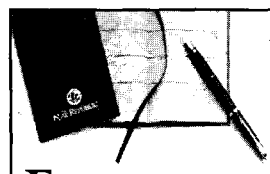

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Afternoons with a Boomerang

An insect afternoon
of annoyance, discontent, the vain wish to be
far away, and I sit on the patio
staring at lawn, woods, receding green patches
with the impossible loveliness
of vanished children's books—

yet here it is around me,
consoling if not healing; I know no kinder place
in which to bear involuntary gloom.
Then across the patio comes a blur,
red shorts, legs, arms, three strides to grass
and I can focus now

on Richard, coming out
from under the weight of his own troubles, his hand
cocked, gripping a bright handmade boomerang
that now he throws, like a knife at a target.
For sixty instantaneous feet
it flies straight, then yanks left

and banks upward, tilting
into level flight, a spun, evanescent circle
back to the house, then toward another sweep
by the woods, flickering in and out of view
against backgrounds of sycamore
and maple, sky and grass—

a flutter of silence
to where he pirouettes, watching the cycle close
as the end of the spiral drops within reach
and he plucks it from air. Our separate woes
may not pass for more than a moment,
but this is the moment.

Not that he never misses:
the stick will spin too hard to be caught, or a stray
current of air from the woods grabs an edge,
or he has to look into the sun. Sometimes
the gravel driveway breaks his stride
over the dampening grass.

Twenty minutes, half an hour,
and his arm tires; still, it always feels like forever,
infinite small variations within
the aboriginal pattern, and I think
that whatever their use among hunters,
artists most deeply own

these physical mysteries
of getting a skill right, or nearly so, or, rarely,
of getting it wrong, the shout going up
at the botched release, the sharp smile of disgust
as the boomerang goes off course
and snags itself in a tree.

Error and correction,
flight and return, our son pulling hard as he can
toward making a life that is his, lifting
himself a little from his private griefs,
and me, for a while, out of mine—
and though the pain returns,

he gives, in fading light,
a look of birthright ease to a difficult thing.
Whatever unrolls on this spiral path—
lifelong though it may be, and hard—is worth no more,
in the end, than these crystal instants
of grace and lighthearted awe.

HENRY TAYLOR

black southerners as well, of their heritage, and, therefore, their identity." Whether or not there is such a "campaign," it is true that the South can certainly use some help in explaining itself. Southerners of both races have long endured casual slurs on their intelligence and morals; they have long sought a language accepted by the larger American culture with which to defend themselves. But the version of the conservative tradition that Genovese defends seems unlikely to provide that language. Black and white Southerners may well continue to draw on the communal ideals of their churches, families and traditions, as Genovese counsels, but in explaining themselves they seem likely to choose a more vernacular tongue than John C. Calhoun or Allen Tate can offer.

There are, after all, southern traditions that are not conservative ones. These traditions come from generations of living in a region dismissed and patronized by the rest of the country; they have fostered a cultural style that punctures pretension. These traditions have had conservative, liberal and even radical political consequences; they have celebrated individuality and independence; they have questioned the legitimacy of inherited hierarchy and established authority. Such traditions uniformly value the courtesy and the civility that Genovese rightly admires in the South, but they value these virtues for their own sake, not as by-products of stratification.

The South, it might be argued, needs a less defensive posture than white conservatism affords. The South needs to reclaim and to extend to all people the hopeful civic tradition that its leaders created for whites at the nation's founding. The region needs a rejuvenated faith in the common good, for the original faith was stunted by generations of slavery, segregation and disfranchisement. That renewed civic tradition would value local "organic" connections, just as Genovese counsels, but it would also look toward larger and more abstract responsibilities, toward more inclusive symbols and more generous statesmanship, toward a more creative engagement with the modern world. Given memories of slavery and disfranchisement, this southern tradition might well claim liberal dreams of individual freedom as the hardest-won and most precious southern inheritance of all.

It is testimony to the power of Eugene Genovese's book that liberal readers, whether they care about the South or not, may rethink some of their assumptions after closing this volume. On the most superficial level, some might be willing to recognize in the white South some

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element of wisdom or insight they had missed before. More deeply, some readers might reconsider whether an acceptance of hierarchy is a threat to the good society. Others may reconsider the hidden costs and meanings of such words as "freedom" and "individual." An age that seems so concerned with the reassertion of "family values," that grants such a respectful hearing to "natural" explanations of racial inequality, and that is so distrustful of the state may prove receptive to a tradition that has long placed an acceptance of inequality at its center. But other readers will look to more hopeful aspirations, other ways to restore civility, other traditions to honor, other dreams to dream.

EDWARD L. AYERS teaches history at the University of Virginia and is the author of *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press).

A Child's Garden of Evil

BY ANDREW DELBANCO

Shelter
by Jayne Anne Phillips

(Houghton Mifflin, 279 pp., $21.95)

Long before Jayne Anne Phillips conceived of *Shelter* as a full-scale novel, she composed a short passage that eventually became its opening paragraph. It was an account of a young girl seeking respite from the "heat of noon" in the bunkhouse of a girls' camp during a West Virginian summer. "I think I wrote *Shelter*," Phillips says, "in order to understand that paragraph." Standing alone as a kind of epigraph in front of the narrative proper, it draws the reader into an archetypal American experience, the world of campfires and chill morning swims and nighttime whispering within the protective sound-screen of the crickets. It asks us to "concede the heat of noon in summer camps" and to recall the embarrassment of going to the counselors to plead faintness, then the relief of finding sanctuary within "the rough wooden walls exuding shade." It invites us to feel how

> the heat has come over you, settled in from above and sucked your insides until you must lie down to sleep in the empty cabin while the rest are at hiking or canoes or archery ... in your mind, you see the bodies lying there, each in its own future. You are frightened because it is you here with the future.

Relinquishing this slightly imperious second person singular, the novel quickly settles into a third-person voice for telling its several tangent stories—beginning with the family memories of 15-year-old Lenny Swenson and her younger sister, Alma, a few cabins away. One of Phillips's gifts is an ability to build coherent fictions out of a range of voices. Ever since the early stories of *Black Tickets* (1979) and *Fast Lanes* (1987), she has been able to write in the idiom of the trailer-park Mama as comfortably as in that of the bookish dreamer. In *Shelter*, where each chapter amounts to an interior monologue belonging to a different consciousness, her virtuosity is on full display.

The result is a novel that has the quality of an extended eavesdrop. We overhear Lenny telling her friend Catherine (Cap) Briarley about the night she came downstairs late and saw her mother pressed against the kitchen counter by a man who was biting and kissing her. The memory of that sight is enfolded within the memory of her confiding it to Cap a few weeks later, and of Cap's excited emulation as she listens, "grabbing Lenny, lying on her, sucking at her shoulder to make a warm, soft bruise." Afterward, Lenny remembers, they coiled "together like eels in the wide tub," then wrapped themselves

> naked in the old rabbit coats Cap's mother stored in the closet. The skins were torn, the silk linings soiled; Cap would turn the coats inside out and the girls pulled them on like bathrobes. At first the fur was so cool and shivery it made the hairs on Lenny's arms stand up, but it warmed and was so soft she had to rub herself against it.

The groping figure whom Lenny sees in the kitchen "sucking her [mother's] neck, like a vampire" turns out to be the father of Alma's friend Delia Campbell—a man who, parched by his own marriage and shamed by his adultery, kills himself by driving off a bridge. Months later at camp, haunted by the memory of seeing his corpse in its casket, Alma lies on a cot in the dissipating heat of evening, trying to blot out the image of this man who had loved her mother, his cold skin dusted with rouge as he lay in his coffin like "a long stone doll with paints on its face."

These are the kinds of damaging and irrepressible memories of which *Shelter* is composed. The girls spend their nights whispering them aloud in a sort of exorcism-chant, as if searching for "a way to make things that had really happened seem as though they never had." Seeing their parents' past as a premonitory glimpse of their own future, they try to talk it away. For all of them—Lenny, Cap, Alma, Delia—camp is a chance to screen out the hints of adult anguish that have come filtering through to them in daily life at home. Camp is an exquisite relief—"like being asleep, like a long, long dream.... Time was big here and Alma wanted oceans of it, more and more, so that her past seemed a smaller and smaller island barely discernible as the sailor looks back from the sea."

As Phillips closes in on the inner lives of these children whose bodies are ripening, she reduces the public world of outward events to a dispensable frame—a decision that gives *Shelter* a different scale and proportion from that of her sprawling first novel, *Machine Dreams* (1984). Stretching over decades, *Machine Dreams* was an expansive book in which multiple perspectives were used to follow a small-town family from the Depression to the Vietnam War. *Shelter* is a tighter, smaller book, limited to a few voices and a few days; but what it loses in scope, it gains in intensity.

The date of the action—it is summer, 1963—may be inferred from a remark made by the camp directress, Mrs. Thompson-Warner ("you may remember just last fall, when Castro and the Russians were ready to attack us"), in one of the current-events classes that she requires of her girls. As "regional secretary of the Daughters of the American Revolution," she rants about Khrushchev (that "short, fat, bald man with a swollen hairless face"), calling him "Lucifer in the flesh" and "Beelzebub." Insisting that "people have to be educated to recognize evil," she seems to have learned her pedagogical technique—chiefly innuendo—from the likes of Joe McCarthy: "The furnace of the Russian embassy," she darkly hints, "burns at temperatures hot enough to cremate human bones...." Despite her efforts to alert them to the world emergency into which they have been born ("Mrs. Thompson-Warner told them numerous stories and facts about Communism; Alma jotted down details that seemed related"), the girls are unmoved. They exist out of time, in a kind

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of aphrodisiac rain forest where they ramble through "the tall grass flying, [with its] wet, cut smell" and breathe "the warm loamy smell of something old, folded in for eons" arising from the fecund earth.

But if *Shelter* is an exceptionally sensual book, it is also a study of how sexual need can become coercive and violently destructive. Such is the nature of desire in the fallen world just outside the perimeter of the girls' Eden—where a desperate alcoholic named Carmody shares a shack with his wife and her 8-year-old son, Buddy. Each morning, when she trudges to camp to cook for the girls, he forces Buddy to run ice cubes over his nipples and croon to him "like a girl" while he strokes himself to orgasm. Carmody is a creature of prison, where he was sexually abused and from where he emerges as a half-whimpering, half-snarling brute. He is something of a gothic cliché—evil incarnate—sniffing out the possibilities like an animal awakened by the scent of prey. Phillips builds suspense by teasing us with the horrific possibility that he will get within range of the girls.

While Carmody paces and circles, another ex-con intervenes—an itinerant religious fanatic known only as Parson, who knew Carmody in prison and has become obsessed with him as "a pit the devil had filled." Having come a long way in search of him, Parson takes a job with the local road crew and sticks close. Like Mrs. Townsend-Warner, he speaks fluently about the devil:

> Having known it, he spoke of smelling its approach and described the smell, he spoke of the Devil's fragrant oils and the swollen itch of the Devil's hunger, of stanching the flow of the Devil's bloody need, for that need was a mortal wound at the ravaged breast of Jesus, who took no woman and no man and was loved by God.

Parson smells evil especially in the spillages of the body—in menstrual flow, in semen—and believes that he "must spill his seed on barren ground, never in the house or in his bed, seduced by pleasure, he must cleanse himself kneeling alone where the earth was hard, or in the cold of the river." At first he is weirdly compelling in his compulsive need to purify himself, but after a while he starts to sound like a hillbilly cousin of Jack D. Ripper in *Dr. Strangelove*, the lunatic general who is obsessed with his bodily fluids.

As these emblematic characters line up along a spectrum of fixed moral meanings, one hears the creaking of allegorical machinery. Carmody is the slithering serpent. Mrs. Townsend-Warner (who sees evil exclusively as an external threat) is prudish self-righteousness. Parson is the embodiment of guilt. Wandering through the woods with a none-too-subtle symbol in his hand ("the snake he held was like a long muscle, its flat head hidden in his fist, its tongue flicking out through his fingers..."), he is obsessed with his own pollution, and feels "most free when he had seen the Devil in some vulnerable guise and subdued him." His pursuit of Carmody is an act of self-mortification. But it is not quite clear whether he will overcome his own rising desire as he spies the girls swimming, their "breasts ... like white apples ... not the large breasts men slept in, but breasts men mouthed and tasted, nearly tore with their teeth."

"I wanted to think about evil," Phillips has explained about her methods and motives in *Shelter*, "about whether evil really exists or if it is just a function of damage, the fact that when people are damaged, they damage others." The trouble with this theory as it works itself out in the novel is that Carmody and Parson are not so much fully conceived persons as they are ambulatory symbols, representations of wounded males who turn savage. It is as if they have wandered in from a Flannery O'Connor story. As exemplars of the "damage" theory of evil—a favorite platitude in our culture—they are not sufficiently compelling.

The other problem with the theory of "damage" is that everyone in *Shelter* has been hurt in one way or another (Lenny harbors half-conscious memories of her father touching her belly and thighs; Delia sleepwalks as she tries to cope with memories of her father's death), and Phillips is too good a writer to commit herself to any formula by which the consequences of childhood pain can be calculated. How is one to explain why one suffering child grows up demented, reviling the world, while another lives to love and save the innocent? How is one to explain why some people see evil only outside themselves, while others sense it welling up as the "frantic ... focus" of their own sexuality—as a kind of carnal solipsism?

In the end, Phillips's novel listens to its own contradictions, and declines to solve its own riddles. As theology, it runs the risk of offering a facile response to the problem of evil; but as fiction it has the tact to refrain from answers while persuading its readers of the mystery of the question.

ANDREW DELBANCO's new book, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil*, will be published next fall by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

TRB *continued from page 6*

"It's not the health plan, is it?" she asked him that evening as he stretched languidly on the bed.

"No, it's not."

"You don't want to throw it all away! What you are asking is that I articulate clearly the vision that we share!"

"Yes, yes. That's it." He rolled her onto him, and she pinned his shoulders with her knees...."

—excerpt from draft novel (Meaning at Midnight) *by Hillary Rodham Clinton*

It was cold and raining. Democrat weather. His wound was acting up. He entered the foyer at 10 Downing Street. One aide was there to meet him. Not exactly the red carpet treatment. Bush. They'd all have been out here for Bush. The P.M. looked like she'd had better days too. Someone call Kevorkian. Maybe call him collect. But then her eyes met his and lit up like bombs over Belgrade. He might enjoy this evening after all.

"Senator," she whispered. "Don't go all wobbly on me now." ...

—excerpt from draft novel (Love and Strike) *by Senator Bob Dole*

Their lovemaking over, at last they lay still. It was at times like this that she often unleashed her Fourth Instinct. He mustn't let her see just how terrified he was. But it was too late.

"Darling.... Isn't it time for you to run again?"

"Hell," he thought to himself. "Here we go. Why couldn't I just have married Mrs. Little Goodie Two-Shoes?"

Suddenly, Diana the Huntress gave way to a pouting kitten. She stretched and curled up beside him.

"It's O.K., honey," she purred. "You don't have to be president if you don't want to."

—excerpt from draft novel (Margin of Error) *by former California Congressman Michael Huffington*

"My position is softening," said the general's wife, leaning toward him, her chest heaving. He had seen them all. The slim and attractive Mrs. Cedras. The beautiful and eloquent Mrs. Mengistu. The coquettish Mrs. Pol Pot and the voluptuous Madame Saddam. But this woman was superb....

—excerpt from draft novel (Passion for Peace) *by former President Jimmy Carter*

"Oh, Senator. I've been waiting *so* long for you to do that!" ...

—excerpt from draft novel (On the Senate Floor) *by Senator Bob Packwood*

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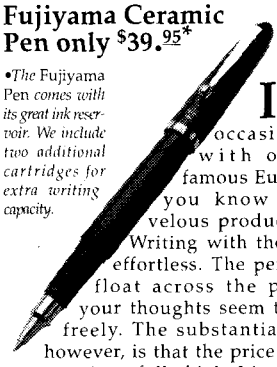

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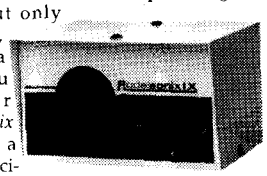

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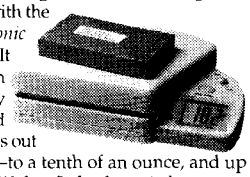

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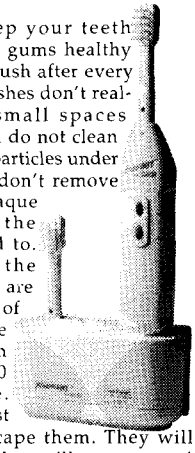

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NEW YORK DIARIST

Mr. Speaker

THE GIFT OF ELOQUENCE IS AS suspect as that gift from the Greeks, though the suspicion is that it carries nothing inside. Praising someone for eloquence usually implies that the decorative art is a substitute, even camouflage, for heft and originality. That may have been said of Mario Cuomo, but I never thought so. To me, Cuomo's gift of eloquence was the genuine article. Now that he is out of politics, presumably forever, so, in my judgment, is the best pure speaker-politician since John Kennedy. And Cuomo never used those cloying Kennedy parallelisms.

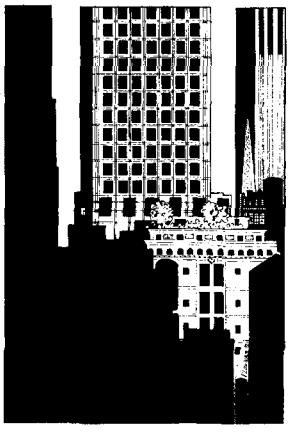
AT THE TOP OF HIS GAME, HE could do something to an audience that was close to hypnosis: make them feel they were thinking what he was saying. He rarely spoke from prepared texts; he only used notes, single-word clues. When you're on a roll that goes so deep inside you that you feel that it has to come up for air or die, you suddenly hear the people in the audience give you your own lines—in the embracing stares, the tilts of the heads, the passive passion of the faces. It is as if you have shared an inchoate mass of thought, and have decided to produce the mutually agreed upon sentence. When that sentence is produced, when it is stretched in the air like an arrow, it hits home even as it flies.

CUOMO WASN'T ALWAYS THAT good. His most famous speech, the keynote at the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, was a mishmash of clichés: "There are people who sleep in the city's streets, in the gutter where the glitter doesn't show...," and so forth. The speech was overpraised because the press wanted to hear a good old-fashioned liberal talk, and as a punishment, its wish was granted. Cuomo was most effective when he didn't sound like a party-liner, but when he seemed to be discovering liberalism anew—when he was overheard debating himself.

THAT QUALITY OF SOLILOQUY WAS what made his speech defending abortion rights, at Notre Dame in 1984, a thing of beauty. He wasn't out to win an argument; the argument on abortion cannot be won. Instead, he wanted to push a lever of self-inspection in his listeners that would pry them out of adamancy:

> In the end, I'm convinced we will all benefit if suspicion is replaced by discussion,... if the emphasis in our debate turns a search for talismanic criteria ... to an honest, more intelligent attempt at describing the role religion has in our public affairs.... And if we do it right—if we're not afraid of the truth even when the truth is complex—this debate ... can bring relief to untold numbers of confused, even anguished Catholics, as well as to many others who want only to make our already great democracy even stronger than it is.

THE WISH TO MAKE ONE'S AUDIence think, rather than to convert it to a point of view, would be a weakness or a poor tactic in a less able political speaker. Political audiences generally do not want to think, do not come prepared to think; they come to cheerlead. Cuomo won audiences to his side not so much with his power of intellection as with his voice—the New York Queens street voice that moderated the often fancy-referenced talk; his illogical leaps (especially when he thought he was being logical); his malleable immigrant face (of which he made fun and use); and his Catholicism. If Catholics appreciated the depth and ardor of his faith, Protestants and Jews seemed to take to it even more. In an age when politicians want to be seen going to church, it was gratifying to have someone who actually prayed when he got there.



HE DID ME A FAVOR ONCE, RELUCtantly. I was to moderate an evening panel on the slightly overreaching subject of "Who is God?" at the 92nd Street Y, and I called Cuomo to ask him to be on the panel. Trying to wriggle out, he told me: "I have to speak to some farmers that day." I suggested: "Farmers don't stay up that late." He retorted: "What time, and what do you want me to say?"

OF COURSE, THAT SUBJECT WAS the last in which he needed outside instruction. It was his meat; the typical Y audience his potatoes. This was in October 1991, and lurking as the subtext was the quadrennial question: Would Cuomo run for president in '92? He joked his way out, as usual, then settled into the night's subject:

> If the answer [to "Who is God?"] could not be compelled by our intellect, we pleaded for an answer that, at least, we could *choose* to believe without contradicting that intellect. It had to be more than just a God of prohibition. More than just a God of guilt and punishment. It had to be more than John Calvin's chilling conclusion that God loves Jacob but hates Esau. More than Robert Browning's cold and capricious Caliban. It must be a God like the one that was promised in the ancient books: a God of mercy, a God of peace, a God of hope. In the end, to make any sense, it must be a God of love.

NO ONE BUT HE KNOWS WHY HE DID not run for president. He probably could have won the nomination over Mondale and Dukakis, and Clinton, too. If, as is likely, he would have beaten George Bush, the nation would have been deprived of *Bush*'s eloquence, so maybe things turned out as they were meant to. My own small theory for Cuomo's inaction is that he looked inside himself and decided that the presidency was a stretch. So modest and sane an assessment would have disqualified him anyway. The idea of running constituted the temptation of Mario, and he spent most of his time shifting between ambition and sin.

THERE WERE OTHER appealing features: He was still the choir boy who daydreamed of baseball practice. There was a manic side, too; once in my presence, he painted a moustache on a poster of Cardinal O'Connor. And he spent a lot of time alone, thinking, writing in his diaries. Once he described his study in the Albany mansion, which sounded like a monk's cell: nine by eleven feet; bookshelves on the walls; a roll-top desk. "And the blinds are drawn," he said. "I always keep them drawn. I don't enjoy solitude. I use it." He also told me: "Sometimes I feel that I spend too much time thinking about what I'm thinking."

BY NOW YOU HAVE FIGURED OUT that I like him—not just as a man but as a political leader. Any politician who can keep New York State from explosion and collapse for twelve years is all right by me. Demonstrably last month, most New Yorkers disagreed. Now they can enjoy George Pataki's eloquence. For myself, I'll be pleased to remember sounds like the speech Cuomo gave against the death penalty in 1989, the last such New Yorkers will hear for a while. After saying that the death penalty lowers public morality, that it "never inspired anything but hate," he took the side of a parent who would want revenge for the murder of a child. Then he added: "I know this society should strive for something better than what we are in our worst moments." Thank you, governor.

ROGER ROSENBLATT

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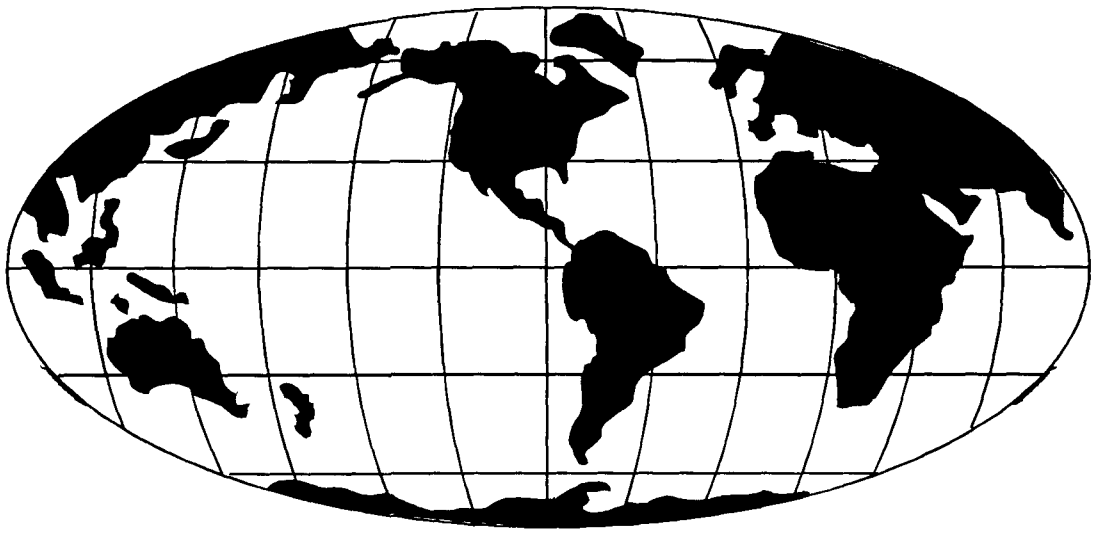

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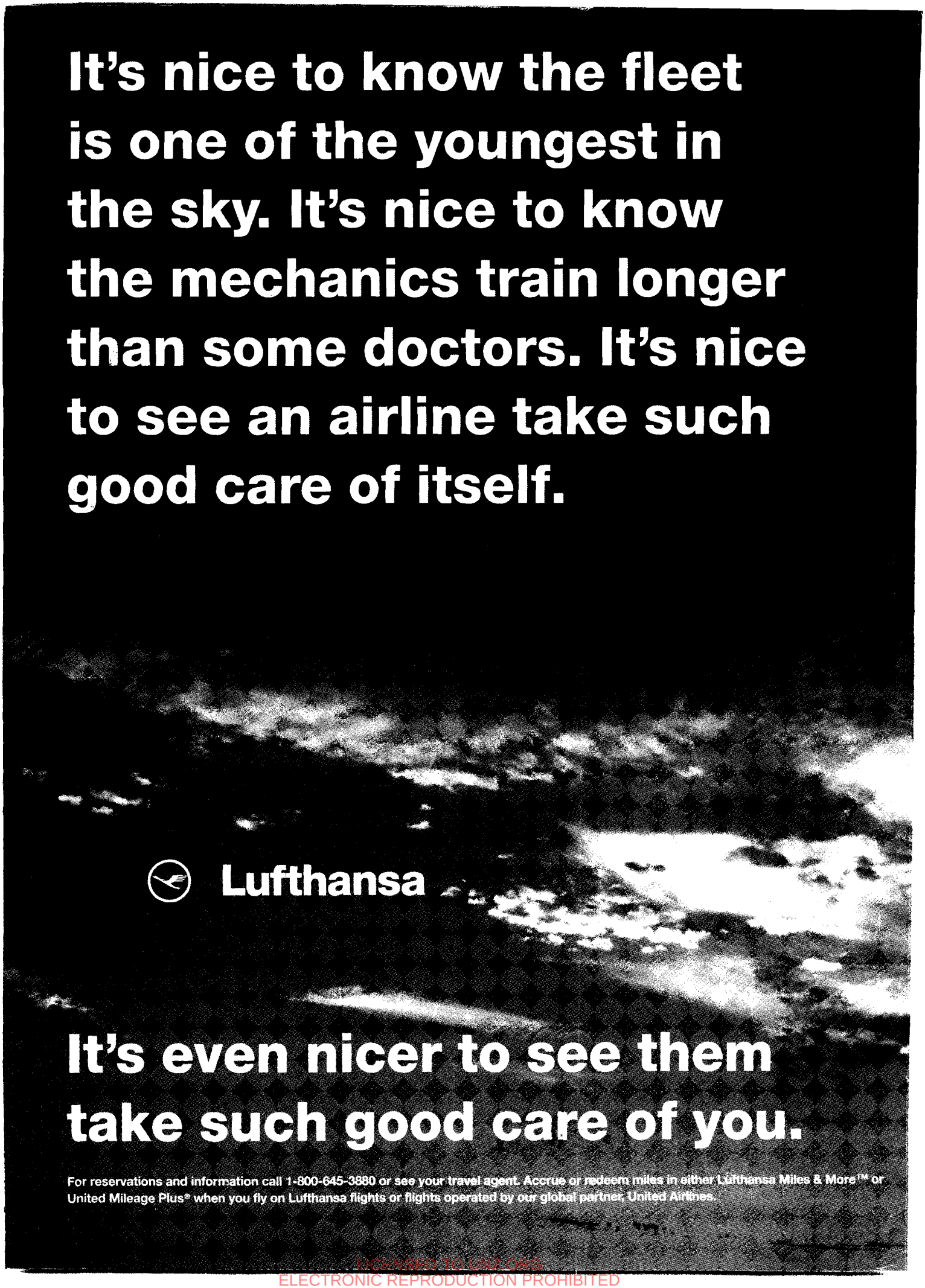
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